Three Golden Days

William Walkley

Nelda Spencer

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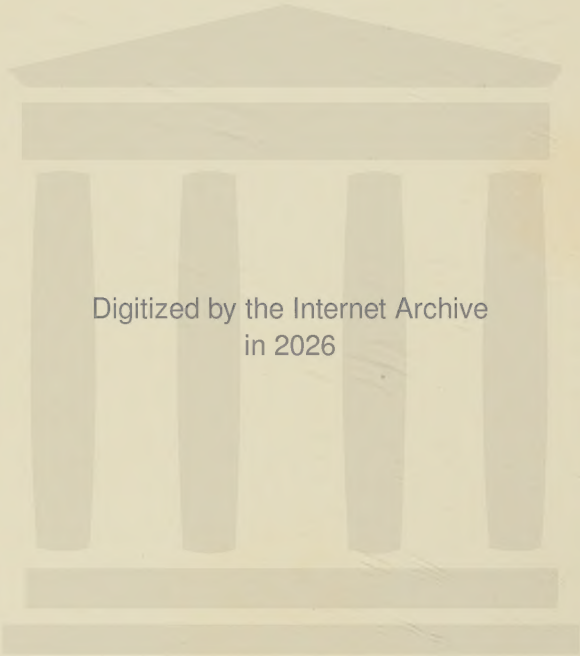
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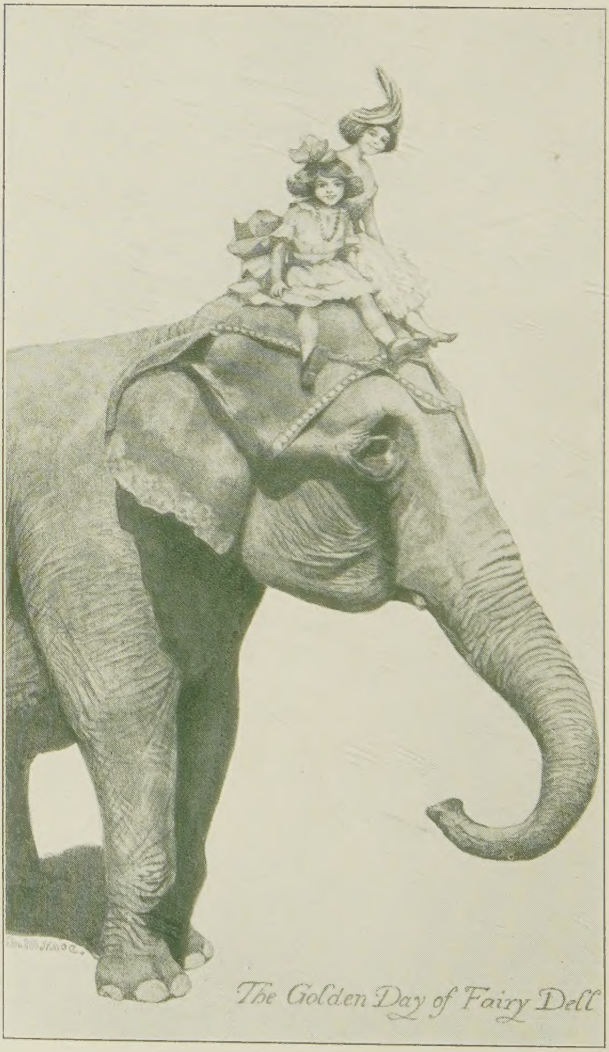

The Golden Day of Fairy Dell

Three Golden Days

Tan-Bark Tales

By
WILLIAM S. WALKLEY

ILLUSTRATED

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This little book of tales is
affectionately dedicated
to

WILLIAM PATERSON WALKLEY

My son and the companion
of many golden days

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I

The Golden Day of Billy Smith

"Good-by Tug! Good-by Billy!"

I

TUG WILSON WRITES A LETTER

A SMALL boy lay flat on his back, staring with wide-open eyes at an imaginary procession of jungle beasts, chariots drawn by spotted ponies, gorgeous caravans and spangled men and women which wound its attractive way across the ceiling of the dimly lighted hospital ward. He could not sleep, although it was not the huge plaster cast incasing his cruelly twisted little body which was the cause of his wakefulness. With his eyes shining like brilliants, and his ears strained to the slightest sound, the night nurse found him each time on her hourly round.

"Now, Tug Wilson, you must go to sleep," she insisted. "You'll run up your temperature, and then what will the doctor say?"

"Oh, I know him," answered the boy cheerfully. "He'll say, 'Now, Mr. Wilson, what have *you* been doing, I'd like to know?' And I'll just say: 'Circus.' And then he'll squinch up his eyes and say very solemn: 'Quite so, Mr. Wilson. How is the elefunts?'" He chuckled softly, and, possessing himself of the

nurse's hand, drew her down close to the pillow. "Say, Nursey," he whispered, "I'll bet the doctor is out there now, waiting to see the show unload."

"You ridiculous child," she laughed. "He's been in bed hours and hours ago. Why, my dear, it is two o'clock!"

"Gee, but they're late!" said Tug anxiously. "Mebbe somethin's happened."

"Don't you believe it," she replied confidently. "Circuses are always late, you know."

"That's so," agreed the little fellow. "Nursey, can't you open the winder wider, so's I'll surely hear the train?"

Although the window stood open to the full limit the nurse, being an understanding young woman, made a show of raising it still farther. She bent over and kissed Tug on his white forehead.

"Tug, dear," she pleaded, "won't you try to go to sleep—to please me?"

Tug wavered an instant. "I can't, Nursey," he replied honestly. "Please hand me my string."

"String? What string?"

"On this side, by the head of the bed. It's to wake Billy Smith with. Billy was awful sleepy, and so 'fraid he'd miss hearing the show unload I promised to wake him up. The

string's tied to his wrist, and when I'm *sure* I'll pull it hard and Billy and me'll listen together. He's only a little fellow, you see, and can't never get well."

The girl's eyes were wet, and she could not speak for the lump in her throat; she silently handed the child the string, kissed him and left him to his eager vigil.

In a little while the shriek of a locomotive shattered the hot stillness of the night, and Tug held his breath. The engine puffs grew slower and louder as the heavy train trundled to a standstill behind the big block of houses across the street from the hospital.

Tug breathed again. "That's the circus," he sighed happily. He waited to be absolutely certain before waking Billy Smith. He could hear men's hoarse voices shouting orders; then more voices—among them the piping treble of small boys. Presently the rumble of a heavy wagon on the granite blocks was borne on the night air, and Tug gave the string an excited twitch. Billy gave signs of returning consciousness, but he was terribly slow about it. Tug gave the cord a mighty yank, which brought a thin white hand out from under the covers, and a tousled flaxen head was raised a fraction of an inch from the pillow.

"Billy Smith!" cried Tug in an agonized

whisper; "ain't you never going to wake up? I can't hear a thing while I'm doing this. The circus is here!"

Billy was awake in an instant. "Where? Oh, Tug! Are you sure?"

"Bet yer life. I heard a wagon. Listen."

"Mebbe it was an ice wagon," ventured Billy.

"Naw!" hissed the disgusted Tug. "Ice wagons ain't out this time of night. And there ain't no wagon on earth makes the same sound as a circus wagon. Gee! I wish we was out there."

"So do I," palpitated Billy. "Tug, do you suppose any of those men we hear is clowns?"

"No, they ain't," Tug declared scornfully. "Clowns don't work. The newspaper advertisement says they got '32 Merry, Mirthful, Madcap Jesters, 32—Count 'em!' I know it by heart. Aw, Billy, let's listen now! I'll tell you all about the p'rade in the morning."

So they listened and interpreted the mysterious night sounds according to the understanding of eight years. An elephant trumpeted hoarsely, another took it up, and for a brief space the night rang with the weird cries. Tug and Billy shrank half under the bedclothes, and most delicious thrills of fear coursed down their spines.

"Lions," said Tug in a voice of awe.

"Taggers," affirmed Billy. "Gosh! it made my back all crinkle up."

"Mine too," confessed Tug. "But they was lions, Billy. If they was taggers I won't never wake you up again."

"Oh, Tug, please let 'em be taggers," pleaded Billy. "I wanted 'em to be taggers, and you don't care, do you?"

Tug pondered the mighty question. He did want them to be lions; but Billy was such a little chap, and the doctor had said he could never be well again, and ——

"Oh, I suppose so," he said slowly. "They're taggers, Billy. But I don't believe it."

Billy received this magnanimous concession with a sigh of contentment. He listened with all his might, but the monotonous rumble of the heavy wagons soon lulled him to sleep again.

Tug still struggled against an overwhelming drowsiness, but at last he, too, faded into slumber, with the consciousness of duty well done. He had got the circus "in."

The Boys' Ward was awake and buzzing with excitement early that morning. The pinched, waxen faces of the children took on a tinge of colour, and their eyes sparkled in an-

ticipation of the great parade with its many bands, open cages of wild beasts, elephants, camels, and, last and always, the goodly company of thirty-two jesters of the sawdust arena.

Billy and Tug related the story of their thrilling night adventures to a rapt audience, and when they roared to show how the jungle folk do it, a delightful creepy chill ran from cot to cot. It was well worth lying awake all night for.

"Maggie," called a youngster near the corridor where Maggie McShane, a strapping scrub-woman, was wading an inland sea of soap and water, "Maggie, is it time for the p'rade? They're going to take us out on the balcony to see it."

"You pore darlint!" said Maggie tenderly, "there won't be no parade this year, Jimmie. Circuses have give parades up, bad luck to thim."

"Maggie," faltered Jimmie, "are you joking?"

"It's not joking I am, but the living truth; the paper said this morning there'll be no parade. But don't be minding it at all—oh, Lord help me, what have I done!"

Jimmie crumpled up on his pillow and his thin shoulders began to heave convulsively.

Each stricken face reflected the awful news, and sobs and lamentations testified to the tragic disappointment of childhood.

Tug lay with a set face, his disappointment too deep for noisy grief. He rang his bell and the nurse came.

"Is it true?" he asked tremulously. "Ain't there going to be no p'rade?"

"No, dear," she told him with a queer turn in her voice. "I'm sorry. Oh, Tug, do you care so very much?"

Tug covered his eyes with a thin, stick-like arm, and the nurse hurried away. All that day he would not relax his stony visage, even when, during the afternoon performance, the blare of the circus band came faintly through the ward windows.

A chance remark of Billy Smith's broke the spell. "I'll bet," said Billy, "if the man what owns that circus knew about us kids down here he'd lend us a clown. They'd never miss one out of thirty-two."

Tug lay still for a long time after that, and the hard lines of his face gradually relaxed as the glimmer of a great hope began to shine in his eyes. Finally he rang his bell.

"Nursey, please stoop down here," he began timidly. "I want to ask you something."

For five minutes their heads were so close

together that when the nurse nodded her head she bumped Tug's brown pate. In the end Tug gave a happy laugh.

"That's a go then," he said, beaming. "You write it."

"Oh, no!" she declared, "that wouldn't do at all; they wouldn't take any notice of a grown-up like me. You must write it your very own self."

"All right, I will then," he agreed. "You turn me over and prop me so I can write, and tell me what to say. I'll ask him for one."

It cost the little chap one hour of exquisite physical suffering to scrawl the momentous letter, but he did it without a whimper. Exhausted but satisfied he handed the finished product to the nurse.

"Do you think that will bring him?" he asked wistfully.

"It is perfectly splendid," she cried. "I just know something will come of it."

"Honest?" panted Tug eagerly.

"It must!" she assured him, though her heart misgave her. "I'll mail it this minute."

"Bully for you!" he commented. "Put it in the box yourself, Nursey."

The Managing Director of the "World's Greatest Show" was winnowing the daily grist of circus mail with his usual speed and pre-

cision when suddenly something unheard of happened—the Managing Director read a letter for the second time. He put it in his pocket and returned to the remaining correspondence, which somehow failed to interest him.

"By thunder!" he said explosively. "It's a beastly shame!"

Tilting back in his chair, he read the disturbing letter for the third time. It was a boyish scrawl which ran as follows:

HOSPITTLE CRIPPLED CHILDRUN.

MANJER WORL'S GRATEST SHOW.

DEAR SUR: Forty of us kids is very disapointed becauz Maggie McShane, scrub lady, says there aint going to be no prade this year. We are all sick and I've got a plaster cast on me what ways a ton, so we can't come to the show. Billy Smith the kid in the next bed to me says maybee youd lend us one clown out of your 32 clowns. Will you pleeze send down a clown to perform on the sidewalk outside the hospittle. Yours with respecks TUG WILSON.

ps. The doctor says Billy Smith cant never get better and hed like awful to see a clown.

The Managing Director folded the letter with fingers surprisingly gentle, and the affairs of the World's Greatest were neglected while

the boyish appeal played strange tricks with his feelings, sweeping across his heartstrings and arousing emotions which he had not experienced for years. And something way down inside ached whenever he thought of Billy Smith.

"The poor little rooster," he muttered. "Poor Billy Smith."

II

THE HEART OF A SHOWMAN

JAMMING on his hat, the Managing Director walked over to the big tent, which lay hot under the July sun and smelled of strange beasts and much sawdust.

"Hello, Bob," he shouted to a young man carrying a spangled riding trunks over his arm. "Where's Buzzers?"

Bob jerked a thumb over his left shoulder. "Back in the dressing tent playing with my youngster—Fairy Dell. Just left 'em."

In the men's dressing-room he narrowly escaped collision with a man who was careering wildly about with a chubby four-year-old girl astride his neck.

"Come here, Buzzers!" he called.

Now famous Buzzers, as every small boy and many grown-ups well know, is the chief headliner of all the clowns in the big show, and he gets more money than two bank presidents. Anybody can be a bank president, but it takes genius to be a good clown. The famous fellow lowered the child from his shoulders with a hug and a gentle spank.

"Read this letter, Buzzers," commanded the Managing Director, in a voice which made the clown look at him curiously.

The clown took Tug's letter, and as he read the tears started to his eyes.

"The poor little kid!" he exclaimed huskily. "Can't ever get well. Say, that's tough."

The Managing Director nodded. "Those 'forty kids' and Tug Wilson and Billy Smith show me up in rather a bad light," he explained. "You see, I'm the man that abolished the street parade, and it looks as if I'd made a mess of it. Got any advice?"

"Not a bit," said Buzzers. "What those little shavers want is a clown, and I'm going down there after the show this afternoon and do a turn or two for that Billy Smith boy. He's on my mind strong somehow."

The Managing Director clutched the clown's hand in a mighty grasp. "Sure you are," he said heartily; "that's why I'm here. Now there are a few details to ——"

"Just a minute. I want to speak to Fairy Dell's mother."

Buzzers poked his head around the flap of the ladies' dressing-room and called: "Say, Dell, the trip to the beach with the kid is off for to-day. Come in here and I'll tell you about it."

A trim, bright-faced little woman came skipping in with a genial nod to the Managing Director. "What's up, Buzzers? Fairy'll be terribly disappointed."

"I know, Dell, but I've got an engagement after the performance that can't be put off a minute. Show her the letter."

Dell—none other than Madame Renz, the Queen of the Arena—read the scrawl at a glance and handed it back without a word. Fairy Dell came whooping it across the floor and hurled herself boisterously at her mother's knees. With a sob she caught her in her arms and rushed out of the tent.

"It's Billy Smith, you know," said Buzzers awkwardly. "Dell is the tenderest-hearted little woman in the world, and"—his voice broke—"and she's thinking maybe it might be her Fairy. Honest, this is the toughest proposition I ever heard of. The poor little kid."

The Managing Director considered. "Tell Dell she needn't go on this afternoon," he said; "she can take Fairy to the beach instead."

"Not much," objected Buzzers. "I want to go along when the kid gets her first sight of the big pond. Fairy can ride an elephant in the grand entry, and that will hold her until to-morrow."

"All right, Buzzers. I'll leave Billy Smith in your hands. Want any help?"

"Well, I'll see the boys and—oh, don't you worry! There'll be something doing all right enough."

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," laughed the Managing Director. "And I'm obliged to you. I sha'n't forget it."

He hastened back to his neglected correspondence, but before opening another letter he dispatched a note to the matron of the hospital and another to Tug Wilson, Esquire.

Some time later he looked up to find Buzzers the clown at his elbow, trouble written all over his face.

"What's up?" he demanded apprehensively.

"Billy Smith is a bigger contract than I signed for," said Buzzers ruefully. "Mike Concannon swears he is going to take the four largest elephants in the herd and the trick baby; Max Schlieman is crazy to haul down a cage of lions, one of tigers and a hive of monkeys. The Valdare Sisters won't speak to me again unless they can do their bicycle turn; the three Rays want to swing their Indian clubs; and the Great Zaro insists on tying himself into double bowknots. And the Living Skeleton, the Fat Lady and the Dog-faced

Boy—all the freaks—threaten a strike ——"

"Seems to be fairly unanimous," grinned the Managing Director. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" echoed the clown. "I've talked myself blue in the face, and they give me the laugh. This has got to be settled officially. I'm here for a life-preserver."

The Managing Director was turning back to his desk. "All right. Tell them I say the clown outfit will be enough, with the band, of course. Now run along, Buzzers; I can't give this business another minute—oh, yes! Take along all the flags and balloons and peanuts you think necessary. I rather think Billy Smith would like some peanuts."

"No elephants?" Buzzers hung on stubbornly. "Say, kids always like elephants."

"All right! All right!" roared the Managing Director. "You're a big kid yourself! Two elephants, then, including the baby. Now get out!"

With crashing brass and thundering drums the band marched down the broad avenue. Circus music always comes in crashes, and this was circus music of the rippingest sort. Tug Wilson and Billy Smith and all the other fellows drank in every "Poomp! Poomp! Poom-poom-pum-pum!" and "Ta-ra, ta-ra-

tar-ra" and "Whing-clang!" of big horn, cornet and cymbals, as if their very lives depended on it.

Oh, it was glorious, that music! And to be out in the sunshine on the wide balcony with one's Heart's Desire coming nearer and nearer every moment—that was something to live for. Dull eyes glowed with excitement and feverish expectancy flung out hectic banners on many a waxen cheek, while racked little bodies forgot their tortures.

On and on came the band. A crowd gathered like magic before the hospital: men and women and a mob of street arabs in a state of riotous delirium, with a platoon of police to secure fair play for everybody. At last the crowd parted like a wave, and lo! there in the street below the balconies stood a great company of circus people. How that band did play! The tuba player's cheeks swelled and bulged to the bursting point; the cornetists, triple-tonguing like mad, were purple in the face, while the trombones pumped frantically to the shrilling piccolo and bleating clarinets; the finale came with an ear-splitting crash, and it seemed as if the world had emptied itself of sound.

"Lookee! Lookee!" piped Tug. "They're here, Billy!"

"Hooray!" shrilled Billy in an ecstasy of delight. "Hello, Clowns! Hooray!"

"Oh, lookee! See the fat one."

"There's a policeman with green whiskers and ——"

"And red hair. See the dog—on the man's head."

"Where? I can't see! Oh, oh, isn't he cute!"

Transparent, claw-like hands waved a greeting to the long line of funny men in sawdust motley—their very grotesqueness proclaimed them clowns and brothers—bowing and kowtowing in exaggerated courtesy.

"Ain't it great, Billy?" shrieked Tug. "I didn't believe they *really* would come. Lookit! —*elefunts!*—two of 'em! They sent elefunts! See 'em, Billy!"

"Sure, Tug," twittered Billy. "It's—oh, see-e-e-ee!" He went off in a spasm of laughter as a clown fell down in the act of making a bow.

In a jiffy three clowns were playing a game of baseball, convulsing the little folk by their antics. Then while the band played a lively march that made one's feet mark time, a little pantaloon in baggy trousers and long-tailed coat walked out with a campstool, which he unfolded and sat upon, reading a newspaper as

quietly as he would at home. A madcap jester stole up and set fire to the newspaper, but the clown read along just the same as if nothing had happened. The paper was entirely consumed, and still the man made believe he was reading, even pretending to turn the pages that were not there. Funny? The balcony boys were sore from laughter, and Tug laughed so hard he slipped on his back and had to be propped up again.

"Ain't it bully, Nurse?" he shouted when rescued. "Gee, but I'm glad I wrote that letter! Hurry, Nursey—they're doing something." And indeed they were.

In defiance of all law and order a most scandalous prize-fight was going on there in the city street. A great, tall, thin clown with enormous rubber feet was vainly trying to pummel a little, round, pudgy clown, who was as elusive as a flea. They hit the referee, the spectators, anybody and everybody but each other. It was the most ridiculous thing and was getting worse every minute, when a miniature patrol wagon drawn by two of the cutest ponies imaginable dashed through the crowd with clanging gong.

The policeman with red hair and green whiskers sprang out and laid about him with a huge club. He thwacked heads impartially,

and finally dragged the slim clown and the fat one to the patrol wagon, bundled them in, and with clanging gong they were off to the circus calaboose.

Then the elephants transformed that asphalt pavement into a wonderland. On the baby elephant the trainer put a striped pinafore and a cap as big as an umbrella, and fed it out of a nursing-bottle as large as a vinegar-jug! And when the milk was all gone the baby elephant squealed and kicked and behaved as badly as any real baby ever did—until the trainer spanked him! Then the bad four-legged baby became as sweet as honey and hugged the trainer with his trunk, and they were friends again.

"Now you see how badly you children act sometimes," laughed Nurse Whalen. "Only he's worse because he's bigger."

Just to show that he was all right again and feeling fine the baby elephant stood on his head and kicked his funny, round, stumpy legs and rope-like tail right up in the air. And while he was doing that the great, great big elephant stood up on his hind legs and waved the American flag in his trunk. How everybody cheered! And then!—the big elephant fired off a cannon with a bang that made Billy and Tug jump almost out of their skins, and the

baby elephant rolled over as dead as a door-nail! It looked very serious indeed. But the trainer poured some medicine out of a bottle into the little fellow's mouth, and tied a bandage as big as a roller-towel around one front leg, and pretty soon the dead elephant got up and hobbled off as lame as anything on three legs.

Then the trainer brought the elephants up close to the hospital and the knowing beasts thrust their clever, twisting trunks up through the balcony railing for peanuts. Well, that was more fun than anything, you may be sure. And the trainer sat on the big elephant's head and talked to the children and told them that the big one was named "Kim" and the little one "Bimbo."

Those boys were exhausted but supremely happy. If not another thing had happened the entertainment would have remained an unqualified success, and they were still at it. Comical Buzzers did the most fantastic things to a wooden baby; the Hey Rubes tickled the children's funny-bones, and the trick doggie wagged his stump of a tail, walked on his forelegs, turned backward somersaults, and did lots of wonderful things; and all the while the band was ripping out the thrillingest music ever heard.

Once again the clowns faced the balcony. Their clothing was soaked with perspiration and covered with dust; the paint on their faces was streaked and smudged, and they panted for breath like men who have run long distances.

Tug's fascinated gaze was riveted on one big fellow whose white face was marked with red and blue hieroglyphs. The great red slit which passed for a mouth began to work, and Tug chuckled in anticipation of what was to come, only to shrink back, feeling strange and prickly all over.

"Where's Tug Wilson?" was what the clown said.

The balcony became deathly still, expectant.

"Where's Tug Wilson?" repeated the big fellow.

"Answer, Tug dear," prompted a white-capped nurse. "They want to see the boy who wrote the letter."

"Oh, that's it," he whispered shyly. "Shall I holler right out?"

The nurse nodded, and Tug's thin stick of an arm was elevated.

"Here I am, Mr. Clown," he quavered. "I'm Tug Wilson."

The clown's soft brown eyes met Tug's beady black ones, and he nodded with a kindly

smile. "Glad to meet you, Tug," he said. "We—the fellows—are all de-lighted to be here this afternoon, and—and—could you tell us which one is Billy Smith?"

Billy's hand went up like a rocket, and his shrill voice was heard on the instant. "I'm Billy Smith. I'm the boy—over here next to Tug, Clown."

The crowd in the street roared with delight at Billy's eagerness, and the clowns made deep obeisance.

"Hello, Billy!" called up the big fellow. "Take good care of yourself and get well real soon, won't you?"

"Bet your life I will!" squeaked Billy. "Me and Tug's coming to the show next year."

"Good boy, Billy! We'll be looking for you."

"Three cheers for Tug and Billy Smith!" shouted the policeman with red hair and green whiskers.

The cheers were given with a will, the crowd joined in, and the trick doggie wagged his stump of a tail uncountable times a minute.

"Good-bye, boys!" they shouted. "Good-bye, Tug! Good-bye, Billy!"

The band leader raised his baton, and to the tune of an irresistible quickstep the great-hearted circus people turned and went back to their canvas city.

II

The Golden Day of Fairy Dell

She told Oyez Bell
about it one lovely night in May

I

THE QUEEN OF PRETTYMAN'S COURT

LONG before the poets found it out, Fairy Dell knew that the new moon hung in the star-sprinkled sky looked precisely like the paring of a giant's finger nail. She told Ogre Bill about it one lovely night in May, while they were sitting together on the steps of Bill's cobbler's shop at the corner of Prettyman's Court. Ogre Bill was Fairy Dell's uncle; and he smelled of leather and shoemaker's-wax and cement and—to-night—of onions. But for all that Fairy Dell loved him better than anybody else in the whole wide world, and she snuggled up to him in the dark of the doorstep, and put her smooth little hand within his horny, twisted fingers and laid her golden head against him.

"Smell that," she said pantingly, holding a spray of lilac bloom up where she thought Bill's nose ought to be. "Isn't that sweet? I ran all the way home with it from Doctor Tom's—he lets me have all I want of it. The

fairies that take particular care of homes go around and breathe on all the lilac bushes every year, and that is why the flowers smell so sweet. Do lilacs always grow alongside of front doors, to say 'Welcome' to callers?"

"Almost always," assented Bill. "I like lilacs—they are so faithful. Many and many's the time I've seen it, specially out in the country. Let a house burn down, or be deserted and fall into its own cellar through rot and decay, and trees and bushes grow up to hide the ugly scar; and all the flowers, roses and pansies and sweet-william, are choked to death by the weeds—all but the lilacs. Year upon year they keep watch and ward in the dooryard, blooming each springtime and telling with their sweet fragrance that on that spot once stood a home where people lived, and loved, and were happy. I think your home-fairies see to that."

"Of course they do," said Fairy Dell with simple faith. "And —— Oh, Bill! what do you think? While I was picking the lilacs I saw the new moon over my right shoulder, the teentiest, weentiest, little bit of a moon, and it looked exactly like the paring of a giant's finger nail! What do you know about that?"

Bill wasn't in the least surprised.

"Sure it does," he agreed. He nodded his

head two or three times, although it was so dark that Fairy Dell couldn't see him; and then removing his pipe from his mouth he pointed up at the sky with the stem. "It's the shaving off of the finger nail of a ghost-giant. It happened right up yonder."

"A ghost-giant?" breathed the child. "Oh, Bill, how lovely!"

She hunched herself still closer to him, and shifted her head about until at last it fitted comfortably against Bill's shoulder. She never could bear to rest her head against his chest, for then his heart boomed terribly in her ear, and when he talked, his voice made the queerest rumble coming out through his ribs that she couldn't hear what he said at all. Bill smoked and smoked, and Fairy Dell waited and waited. This was part of a delightful game which Fairy Dell never had the patience to win.

"Ogre Bill," she said severely, "don't you *dare!* Who was this ghost-giant?"

"To be sure!" cried Bill as though reminded of something which had happened last week. "The ghost-giant! Well, you know, lots of things go on up there amongst the stars that most people can't account for—shooting stars, for instance. Ask 'em why they shoot, and see what they say. They don't know. I

do. It's on account of ructions up there—the stars get knocked out of place miles and miles! And it was ructions the night the giant trimmed his finger nail—something awful! Jack the Giant Killer's ghost ——"

"Jack!" cried Fairy Dell. "Oh, goody!"

"Look here ——"

"Now, Ogre Bill, don't be horrid," pleaded the child. "My feelings get all bubbly inside just like soda water, and I simply can't help it. Please ——"

"All right then," said Ogre Bill in the pleasantest voice in the world. "As I was saying when you fizzed and blew the cork out, the ghost of Jack the Giant Killer was out a-walking in the cool of the evening alongside the Milky Way, and who should lay eyes on him but the ghost of that rascally giant Blunderbore, who had tried his best to kill Jack, only the lad was too smart for him and—but you know *that* story! Well, naturally Blunderbore was awful mad when he saw Jack's ghost and tried to cry out, but on account of the way his neck was cut, all he could do was to make a terrible whistling noise which scared Jack's ghost almost out of his wits.

"He looked over his shoulder and saw old Blunderbore's ghost tearing after him with murder in his flaming green eyes, and he ran

away as fast as he could, dodging behind comets, and moons, and stars, until, finally, he hid behind Cassiopeia's Chair. Blunderbore's ghost came floundering along wild with rage because he couldn't find Jack's ghost, and in his terrible temper he kicked two or three acres of stars loose and sent them flying away millions and millions of miles—that was the night people down here saw a great swarm of shooting stars and thought the world was coming to an end.

"Anyhow, Blunderbore was all tired out and thirsty, so he sat down in Cassiopeia's Chair that Jack's ghost was hiding behind, and grabbed up the Big Dipper and took a drink out of the Milky Way—and lucky he put the Big Dipper back *exactly* where it belongs, or the poor sailors couldn't locate the Pole Star any more and their ships would run on the rocks. Then old Blunderbore's ghost fell to running his fingers through his hair, and there was a little broken place on the edge of the nail of the ring finger of his left hand, and this rough place kept catching the hairs in it and pulling them out—and that hurt like the dickens, and made the ghost-giant madder'n ever. So he leans over and reaches out a few thousand million miles and pulls out the Sword of Orion from its sheath and trims the edge from his

nail. And the thin paring fell into the Milky Way and floated off down the stream; and it is still floating around up there like a chip of wood or an autumn leaf in the eddy of a brook. About every so often—say once a month—it swims into view, and we can see it. Ordinary folks think it is the new moon—we know better."

"Of course," sighed Fairy Dell ecstatically. "Oh, Bill, you're better than the movies. Isn't it wonderful about the stars? I'd like to see them near to—so near you could talk to the people on them. I'd love to see them all at once. You can't here in Prettyman's Court, on account of the houses and the lights on the street that bust up the view. Did you ever see them near to, Bill?"

"Not so near as you say. But out in the country! 'Pon my word, there's more of 'em than you'd ever believe, Fairy Dell. And near!—I've seen 'em, some nights, when you could almost hang your hat on the points of 'em! It's a pity everybody doesn't live out in the country—for part of the year, at any rate—so near to the good brown earth with its miracles, and so near to the heavens with their glories."

"You *do* love the country, Bill, don't you?" said Fairy Dell wistfully. "Do you know,

some day I'm going to fix it up so that we all can move out into the country. Yes, I will have to attend to that soon. The very next time I meet the Good Fairy I shall mention it. After 'Good morning' and 'I hope you are well, to-day,' I shall remark pleasantly: 'Ogre Bill—he's the very nicest man I know—Ogre Bill wants to live in the country. Just at present he mends the shoes of all the children of Prettyman's Court; but it would suit him far better to move to some pretty place in the country where he could be shoemaker to all the fairies—he could fit the wild Lady Slippers to the fairy feet, you know. Please find us a nice tenement at once.' And she'll do it!—I feel it in my bones!"

"The fairies bring you pleasant dreams, child," said Ogre Bill softly. "I wonder ——"

"Where's Dell?" shouted a small boy, suddenly before them. "Say —— Oh, there you are! Say, Dell ——"

Fairy Dell was standing upright instantly, as though shot up by springs.

"Petey Noseworthy, by what right, base churl, do you approach your sov'reign in such a rotten manner?" she demanded imperiously. "Who was the beautiful airy creature you saw this afternoon dancing like moonshine on the grass and sitting in the leaves of Mike

Tierney's apple tree and playing on a magic harp ——"

"It was Jake Schwartz's jew's-harp!" giggled Petey fatuously.

"Petey Noseworthy," blazed the sovereign in regal wrath, "for that you will not be in the magic Fairy Ring to-morrow. And for getting so fresh with your rightful queen, you're out of the May party too. In the morning you bring back those elf wings I made you—the fairy wand too. It's a edick. Get me?"

The edict paralyzed Petey; the awful terms filled him with consternation, and he proceeded forthwith to humble himself in the dust before his angry queen.

"Aw, gee," he snuffled, "I didn't mean nothin'. I was only foolin'—honest, I was. Can't I be in the May ——"

"Then who was the beautiful being you saw in Mike Tierney's apple tree playing on a *magic* harp?" insisted Fairy Dell sternly.

"Oh!" said Petey, wildly racking his brain for the reprieving name. "Oh, that was—that was—I know—Queen Mab!"

"Queen Mab was day before yesterday," said Fairy Dell witheringly.

"Oberon!" yelled the hapless Petey. "Oberon! That's the guy!"

"Cat's foot!" cried the girl disgustedly. "Oberon is my husband and King of the Fairies. Besides, Billy Smith was Oberon—he's just home from the hospital on crutches, and can't climb trees or run or anything—that's why I let him be king. You go chase yourself, Petey."

"Naw," said Petey, gaining courage. "Wait a minute. It was—it was"—an expression of triumph crept into Petey's voice —"it was Tit—Tit—ann—yuh! Queen Tit-ann-yuh!"

"Took you darn' near a week, thick-head!" commented Titania with royal frankness. "What do you wish to tell your queen? Shoot, Petey, and be quick about it!"

"Oh, yes!"—Petey made obeisance. "By gracious Queen Tit-ann-yuh—anything the matter with that?—old Granny Clinkinbeard's back hurts her something fierce, and will you come and rub it? She says your hand's the only one in the Court what ain't as rough as a file, and don't scratch the skin off when it touches her. Comin'?"

"Your sov'reign comes. The poor old thing—of course I will. If that is all, the audience is at an end. Beat it!"

"It ain't, by gracious Queen Tit-ann-yuh," said Petey, bleating with importance. "As I

come by, Tim Concannon's mother stuck her bean outa the window and says to tell you she's got five kids naked in the kitchen, and will you hold the baby while she souses 'em in the wash-tub? She can't find Tim, and old Mike Concannon's leanin' over Flaherty's bar since seven o'clock—I seen him—and she's all alone."

"The old soak don't deserve all those nice babies," fumed Fairy Dell indignantly. "It's a shame!—and there's Jed Pim that never drinks a drop who'd give a million dollars for a kid of his own. 'Tain't fair—they ought to go round the Court with 'em like we choose sides—Eeny, Meeny, Miney, Mo. I'm going to speak to Doctor Tom about it. Well, Ogre Bill, I shall take Eileen Concannon over to Granny Clinkinbeard's and hold her in my lap while I rub. Last tag, Petey."

And she was off like a shot with Petey in hot and hopeless pursuit. Ogre Bill slapped his knee and chuckled softly.

"My word, she's the queer one," he exclaimed fondly. "Whatever would Prettyman's Court do without her?"

"What would the Court do without whom, I should like to know?" demanded a hearty voice. "Out with it, Bill."

"Ah, Doctor Tom," said Bill. "Sit down,

man, and rest your weary bones. I was only thinking out loud about Fairy Dell—my niece, you know."

Settling himself on the step beside Ogre Bill, the doctor fished out a cigar, and as he lighted it the match ruddily revealed a strong, homely young face—a dependable, likeable face, Bill thought. After a puff or two the doctor carried on.

"Fairy Dell, eh? Well named," he commented. "Everywhere I go in the neighborhood that sprite is in evidence, performing some kindly little act. She mothers the whole Court. You're right; I don't know what we'd do without her fairy presence. Is she an orphan?"

Bill sighed. "Aye. She's what I call a tanbark orphan," he replied; "her folks were circus people. And, doctor, I'd take it kindly if you'd not mention it—Prettyman's Court doesn't know. Not that there's anything to be ashamed of, but I've kept it out of the child's life so far. To be honest, I've been afraid the circus might be in her blood, like; and if it got stirred up—well, you understand. I'd grieve to have her take up with the tanbark."

"There's no fear," reassured the doctor positively; "that isn't inherited—it's a matter

of association. Never having travelled with a circus ——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Bill, "but she has—that's just it! When my own sister Adeline—Fairy Dell's mother—was seventeen, she was carried off her feet by a handsome young circus chap—a bareback rider—and ran away with him. He taught her to ride, and, later, she was billed as the Queen of the Arena. We never saw her again; their wanderings carried them over the whole country, and she wasn't a hand to write—besides there was an estrangement, you know. But she *did* write when the baby was born—from some town out in Kansas.

"The rest is tragedy. Just as soon as the baby was old enough the mother began travelling with the circus again, taking the little one with her. I often think of the little tot roaming about with the tent folks, toddling about the dressing-rooms and being made a lot of by the freaks, and performers, and clowns, and acrobats, and all, and maybe riding on the fat horses or even the great elephants now and then with some friendly trainer. You know, doctor, the circus people are clean, decent, honest men and women, and carry their family life about with them, too. Of course, a big show can't be hampered with a lot of children.

But sometimes when it's a case of going without a big act on account of a youngster in the family, they make concessions. That was the way Fairy Dell happened to travel with the big top; they wanted the Queen of the Arena, you see.

"One night the circus train was side-swiped by a freight, and my sister was killed; and the grief and trouble threw Bob, her husband, into bad ways. He took to drink and gambling; but he stuck to the show, carrying the baby with him. He got some money from the railroad company for his wife's death, it seems, and that finished him. One night, when he wasn't himself, he tried a particularly hazardous somersault while riding bareback, missed his footing, and they picked him up with a broken neck—dead."

"Ah," said the doctor, "now I see why you call her a tanbark orphan—an odd term that I didn't understand. And the child has lived with you ever since?"

"Yes; and blessings on the day that brought her to me, and on the good circus people—'Buzzers,' a clown, and his wife, a trapeze performer—who travelled many a mile to put her in my charge. I like to think about those last days Fairy Dell—the circus people named her that—spent with her friends of the tanbark

rings; the goodness of those merrymakers almost passes belief. Why, Bob hadn't a cent when he died; yet his mates buried him like one of royal blood. They found a letter from me to Dell, my sister, and it was through this that they discovered my whereabouts. That was enough for them; they took up a collection and sent the little 'un here in charge of the clown and his wife. Of course, had I known I would have gone for her myself; but the circus has its pride, and Fairy Dell was one of their own people, born in the show, you might say—and they wanted to see the whole business through.

"From what they told me, the whole circus was in tears when Fairy Dell left them. I should have liked seeing that. Why, up-stairs in a trunk with her mother's and father's circus finery there are photographs of the 'Tattooed Lady,' 'Living Skeleton,' 'Fattest Lady on Earth,' 'Circassian Princess,' 'Missing Link,' 'Giant Maximinus,' 'Dog-faced Man,' 'Bearded Lady,' 'Count and Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb of Lilliput'—snake charmers, albino sisters, ossified man, and I can't tell you what all. And they're written all over with messages of love and tenderness for the little circus orphan; some are spotted with tears, I know. And the midgets—Count and

Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb — wanted to adopt her. Aye, they sent the word very urgent by 'Buzzers,' the clown. Kindly, kindly people, those tanbark men and women."

"Well, well," mused the doctor, "to think that sprite of a girl has had all those strange people come into her life and then go out of it altogether. Of course she was too young to remember anything of her circus existence, and—well—you'd hardly expect them to remember her through all these years."

"But they do. Once a year there comes a letter from the Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb," explained Bill; "a queer, dear, mis-spelled, cramped, little letter from her asking after her 'ever dearest darling Fairy Dell.' And once a year I've written and sent her a photograph of the child. The littlest woman holds the longest memory. I've never had one word of inquiry from her father's people."

"Most interesting," declared the doctor; "no wonder the child believes in fairies, elves, pixies, giants, midgets, and what-not, with all those freaks in her baby-memory."

"Perhaps," said Ogre Bill rather sheepishly, "I'm more to blame for that than anything. It's been a wonderful thing to have her come all ready-made into my childless life—we love her so, the wife and me. And having no

chick of my own, I was unprepared with child lore, and the stories and tales and make-believes—all the fun of pretending."

"To be sure!" commented the doctor understandingly. "You'd missed all that!"

"Just so," said Bill. "And so I had to learn child-myths to retail them to Fairy Dell; and with the learning and telling and understanding a new beauty came into my life, already a sad, drab affair filled with the worn and ugly shoe-taps of the very poor. Yes, I owe much to Fairy Dell: the indefinable rhythm and music of Mother Nature—her flowers and grass and trees and placid waters or rushing torrents, dale and meadow and rounded hill—in twilight and dawn and starry moonlight. I know the God-given glory of the blossoming orchards under the radiant sun, the miracle of each spring with its wealth of full-leaved trees, the minted gold of wheat-fields under the full moon, and the mercy heralded by sweet rains on the roof at midnight. And, Doctor Tom, through her I've learned the beauty that dwells even in Prettyman's Court here. God pity me, should the child be taken from me."

"Good Lord," muttered the doctor. "A love miracle, personally conducted by 'Buzzers,' clown of the circus!"

"But I'm troubled now," said Ogre Bill soberly. "What do you think, doctor? Is it right to keep her here in Prettyman's Court? She's sweet and pure and unsullied as yet—all innocence, in a way. But there's little that's hidden from the children of the very poor, and even baby tongues prattle too understandingly of the evil men and women do. And Fairy Dell's tongue takes kindly to rough and unruly speech—I am afraid for her. If only I could find some clean country village in need of a cobbler."

"And a doctor too!" laughed the physician. "Don't you dare to leave me out."

Ogre Bill shook his head. "Not you!" he exclaimed. "You can't be spared from Prettyman's Court, Doctor Tom. You mend broken bodies, and hurt souls, and wounded hearts, while I mend only worn shoes. I'm afraid you'll have to stick."

He smoked on in silence for a moment, then chuckled contagiously.

"I fancy we'll have to leave that matter of the country to Fairy Dell herself," he laughed. "We were speaking of it only to-night, and the very next time she meets the Good Fairy she intends to speak to her about it. No doubt it will be settled forthwith."

"No doubt at all," admitted the doctor, ris-

ing to go. "No living fairy could refuse her. Good-night."

"Good-night, doctor," said Bill. "And thank you kindly."

A moment or two later, Fairy Dell came dancing out of Prettyman's Court.

"More ructions, Ogre Bill," she cried excitedly.

"How's that?" inquired Bill.

"As I came out of Concannon's I looked up and saw a shooting star—a big one and going like sixty. Old Blunderbore must be on the rampage again!"

"Most likely," assented Bill gravely. "And this time he's hunting little girls who ought to be in bed."

"Ugh!" shivered the child deliciously. "He'll never get me."

With a kiss she danced away a few steps; then came tiptoeing back.

"Bill," she whispered, "I think I'll keep the light burning till you come to bed. It's—it's pleasanter."

II

A MESSENGER FROM FAIRYLAND

"FAIR-EE DELL! Fair-ee Dell!" Petey Noseworthy's thin, small voice carried across Mike Tierney's back lot to the ears of Fairy Dell, and some note of urgency in it checked her instant wrath against Petey, who was forever forgetting his manners in the presence of royalty. Under the warm, kindly sun of late afternoon the back lot lay drowsing as a place enchanted, with errant friendly breezes scattering shower after shower of faded pink petals from the apple trees upon the gay assemblage of fairies, and elves, and fays, gathered there from the purlieus of Prettyman's Court for the Fairy Ring, a mystic pageant of great promise under the guiding hand of Fairy Dell, who, as Queen Titania, was attired all in white, with silver wings sprouting from her shoulder blades and a marvellous silver crown resting upon her golden curls.

At the moment of Petey's hail she had a fairy grip on Hyman Goldstein's ear and was

conducting him, for the fifth time, to his proper place for the opening dance.

"Now you stay there—or I'll skin you!" she hissed, releasing Hyman's ear and turning a red and set face in Petey's direction. "What do you want?" she demanded, savagely, levelling a silver fairy wand at Petey. "You're late again. Always late!"

"Forget it!" puffed Petey. "Your Uncle Bill wants you right away."

"Who—me? Now?" cried Fairy Dell aghast. "Nasty little thing, what did you tell him where I was for?"

"Never told him nothin'; he told me," disclaimed Petey indignantly. "He comes to the door with his apron off, and his hands and face all washed clean like on a Sunday, and says, 'Petey, run over and tell Fairy Dell to come home at once!'"

"Gee whiz!" wailed Titania, great tears welling up into her blue eyes. "Didn't he say what he wants?"

"Naw," replied Petey; "but when I was starting off he said something about a messenger from the Good Fairy being there. I guess they're all bugs on fairies at your house."

Fairy Dell's eyes shone. "Oh, Petey!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me right away? That's the most important part.

Good-bye, fairies, and elves, and fays. Adieu. I am summoned by an emissionary of the beautiful Good Fairy."

"We'll all go with you, by gracious Queen Tit-ann-yuh," volunteered Petey, his court manners returning with his desires. "Maybe you'll need us, and, besides, I'd like to lamp this what-you-call-it from the Good Fairy. Come on—let's!"

"Nothing of the sort," said Fairy Dell with engaging promptness. "I'm much obliged for telling me, Petey, but that doesn't give you an admission ticket—the Good Fairy has sent for *me*. Maybe—if you all stay here and practise your dances—maybe, I'll come back and tell you all about it. But if you snoop and sneak and spy—nothing doing. Now I've got to avaunt like the dickens, or I'll catch it!"

With elfin lightness she sped through the falling petals, leaving an envious group of fairies standing gazing after her until her twinkling feet had carried her lissom body through a hole in Mike Tierney's board-fence. Not until she had traversed the length of Prettyman's Court did her speed slacken, and then for cause! As she neared the house she became aware of the astounding fact that the best-room windows were open and the curtains up! With the sun still shining!

Fairy Dell's eyes widened. "What do you know about that!" she exclaimed, her voice muted with awe. "It must be a Prince, or Aunt Emmy'd never risk fading her blue plush sofy. Gosh! I'm all quivery inside, and something's the matter with my knees."

Never in all her life had Fairy Dell felt like that. She glanced over her shoulder, half hoping that Petey Noseworthy had defied her mandate and was present in the flesh to support his quivery sovereign, and gave a gasp of terror. Not ten feet behind her shuffled 'Tino Pitzi, the hunchback, hideously pockmarked, one eye dead, a livid horror, the other fearsomely alive with flaming malevolence—the Evil Eye of her childish fears. With a muffled shriek and two bounds, she gained sanctuary within her own home, and stood trembling in the doorway of the best room.

By an accident of the sunset, a level flood of light fell full upon her as she stood there on the threshold, making a beautiful aureous halo of her golden curls, flashing back brightly from silver crown and wings and wand, and lighting the soft rosiness of her fresh young beauty. The strong illumination blinded her for the moment, so that she could not see what manner of person the waiting messenger of the Good Fairy might be. But the young man who sat

by the window, carelessly running through a packet of papers in his hands, started to his feet as the fairy apparition appeared with such startling suddenness within Aunt Emmy's dingy best room.

"Your gracious Majesty!" he exclaimed with a merry twinkle in his soft brown eyes. "Enter, I pray you! I have travelled far and in haste, and fain would have speech with you."

He crossed the room and took Fairy Dell, winking and blinking like any daytime owl, by the hand and led her to a seat on the blue-plush "sofy." Presently, when the great fiery discs and tadpoles stopped swimming around before her eyes and she could see again, Fairy Dell looked up into the young man's face; and in that moment something utterly sweet and wonderful came into her life—all in an instant, mind you! Fairy Dell was in love!

"The Prince!" she whispered to herself; and to him she said shyly, "You are the emissionary of the Good Fairy, aren't you? Ogre Bill told Petey Noseworthy so."

"Ogre Bill?" The brown eyes looked puzzled. "You mean ——"

"Of course, you wouldn't know," giggled Fairy Dell. "He's my uncle, William Bellbounce, and I call him Ogre Bill—in fun, you

know. We play fairies and giants and ——" Her clear young eyes looked anxiously into his soft brown ones. "Do you believe in fairies?"

"Well, rather!" declared the young man, feeling that somehow great things hung upon his reply. "Brownies and banshees, afreets and jinns, hobgoblins and imps, trolls and kobolds, gnomes and genii—I don't quite see what we'd ever do without them."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Fairy Dell in amazement. "You know a lot of new fairies, don't you? I never heard of them—Ogre Bill didn't either, that's a cinch." She sighed happily and snuggled up closer to him. "Tell me some more, please."

"Ogre Bill surely knows about Leprechaun, the fairy shoemaker—it's right in his line," laughed the young man. "He is an Irish fairy, and is always seen working away at a single shoe—there's a poem about him:

> "'Do you not catch the tiny clamour,
> Busy click of an elfin hammer,
> Voice of the Leprechaun singing shrill,
> As he merrily plies his trade?'"

"I can see him!" whispered Fairy Dell. "Sitting on a tiny toadstool, and using bee-stingers for shoe-pegs and cobwebs for wax-ends."

"That beats me!" chuckled the young man, running his fingers through his wavy, brown hair. "We'll get on famously together, I can see that clearly. But, most gracious Queen, I am a messenger and must to the business which brings me hither." He held aloft the packet of papers. "I would have you know that the Good Fairy has appointed me Lord High Chancellor, Keeper of the Great Key, Keeper of Her Fairy Majesty's Conscience, and Official Secretary of all important legal documents; and it's some job to hold, let me tell you *that.*"

"Dear me," said Fairy Dell, "how very busy you must be."

"Just so," said the young man. "And among the legal documents, what should I discover, but one bearing your name!"

"Mine!" cried Fairy Dell, sitting bolt upright. "I'll be darned!"

"Queen Titania never says 'darn,'" reproved the young man gently. "Nice little girls don't either."

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Fairy Dell. "All the kids in Prettyman's Court say it. Petey Noseworthy and Tim Concannon and lots more of 'em, say worse than that. Tim smokes too."

"H'm!" said the young man, his lips

twitching in a most unaccountable manner. "It's just as well that I found that paper with your name on it—the Good Fairy knew what she was about, that's sure. We'll have more to say about 'darn' later, my dear, but just now I want you to listen very attentively to what I have to say."

He spread one paper out on his knee and smoothed it with his hands while he talked.

"Your Aunt Caroline Biggs ——"

"I never knew I had one," interrupted Fairy Dell, her eyes as round as saucers. "Ain't that the limit?"

"She was your father's eldest sister," went on the young man, "and she lived in a city a hundred miles from here."

Then the young man explained that Aunt Caroline had married a sea captain who sailed the Seven Seas and knew the ports of the world as well as Fairy Dell knew Prettyman's Court. On many of these voyages Aunt Caroline had accompanied the captain, but at last they grew tired of living on a ship, and bought a great house, over a hundred years old, and settled down and never went to sea again. Then Captain Biggs died, and Aunt Caroline lived all alone in the great house, growing queerer and queerer all the time.

"One day a little over a year ago," he con-

tinued, "she came into my office, a straight, sun-tanned, little woman in odd, faded clothes and carrying a long horsewhip in her hand—you see, her place was three miles out in the country and she had driven into the city, and was afraid to leave the whip in the buggy for fear some one would steal it.

"'Young man,' she said, fixing her bright, black eyes upon me, 'I've got a niece I've never seen and hardly heard of, that I want to leave my attic to. Last will and testament. I'm sound in wind and limb and in my right mind too.'

"'Your attic?' I exclaimed in bewilderment.

"'Certainly,' she snapped, looking as sour as vinegar. 'Didn't you ever hear of an attic? Mine's at the top of my house; and a second story, and a first floor, and a cellar, and barns, and buildings, and fifty acres of land, and ten thousand dollars to go with it.'

"She stood looking at me like a dill pickle for a few moments, and then her eyes began to twinkle and the sunniest smile you ever saw stole here and there among the brown wrinkles, and at last she laughed outright. She reached out a thin scrawny hand, all wrinkled and covered over with big twisty veins, and patted me on the shoulder.

"'Queer, aren't I?' she laughed merrily. 'Anyhow, I'm going to be a Fairy Godmother with the bark on to my niece and leave her all my property. And I like you well enough to make you executor of my will.' And that means that I must see to it that everything is done according to the wishes of your Aunt Caroline.

"I saw the queer little lady a number of times after that," went on the young man; "we grew to be great friends, and I liked her better and better—*you* would have liked her too, Fairy Dell, and the poor lonely old woman would have loved you. My word! She used to tell me all about the out-of-the-way places she had been in all over the world; about witch-doctors, and snake-charmers, and Indian fakirs, and filthy beggars, and mad priests, and beautiful islands inhabited by horrible cannibals, and dreadful typhoons at sea, and wrecks, and all such things, until I used to rub my eyes and wonder if it was really true that the quiet little gray-haired woman could have actually seen all those things. It was like sitting on the Magic Carpet and being whisked in a jiffy to the queerest places you could possibly imagine."

Fairy Dell sighed. "I'll bet she liked the pirates and cannibals best of all," she declared

wistfully; "they're so exciting and—and unusual, don't you think?"

Suddenly she laid her head with its silver crown against his arm and began to sob piteously.

"My dear child, what is the matter?" said the young man, gathering her into his arms and folding her close. "What have I said or done?"

"It's Aunt Caroline," sobbed Fairy Dell. "She went and died and I never knew her. It's a d-da-dar-darned shame, too. All my life I've wa-wanted aunts and uncles and cousins a-an-and—now when I—I find o-one she—she—she's dead! And—a-a-and a p-pe-peach of a story-teller too. Can-can-cannibals an' everything!"

"It's mighty tough luck, I must admit," agreed the young man soothingly; "and nothing to be done about it—except —— Look here, I know loads and loads of Aunt Caroline's stories, and when you move out to her big house I'll come out to see you sometimes and tell 'em to you. How's that?"

Fairy Dell struggled and twisted until she could look the young man straight in the eye.

"Cross your heart and hope you may die, are we going to move out to that big house?—in the country?—away from Prettyman's

Court for good?" she asked breathlessly. "Ogre Bill and Aunt Emmy and me? Oh, tell me it is true."

Solemnly the young man crossed his heart. "Honest to goodness, Fairy Dell, it's as true as I'm sitting here."

"Gee whiz!" cried Fairy Dell rapturously. "I'm so happy it hurts my stummick—just like after Thanksgiving dinner, and you know nobody minds that sort of a hurt. You wouldn't care if you busted."

"Not in the least," laughed the young man. "I think I know just how you feel. Now, as Keeper of the Great Key, I have one more duty to perform." He slipped his hand into a pocket and drew forth a big brass key. "This is the key to your attic, Fairy Dell. Your Aunt Caroline gave it to me a few days before she died, and told me to deliver it straight into your own hands.

"'Nobody is to go into the attic until the child comes to open it herself,' she commanded. 'Do you hear? Not a soul! It is a wonderful attic crowded with trunks and boxes and sea-chests containing treasures—odd, quaint and beautiful things I liked—from all over creation; laces and fans and shawls and silks and gorgeous feathers; ivory and lacquer and sandalwood boxes; ugly heathen idols of mud

and bronze and silver; bead necklaces and trinkets and gewgaws and ——' Here the little old lady stopped and pointed a thin, bony finger at me. 'And remember this! The child is to do as she likes with everything—everything! Nobody is to say "Don't you dare touch that!" or "Look out!" or "Be careful!"—no matter what she does. My childhood was a terrible thing because I never had the fun of breaking anything—I couldn't get my hands on 'em! Good Lord, how soon parents forget their childhood's heartaches and tragedies and visit them upon their own children. Well, young man, you just give her this key and tell her the attic and everything in it is her very own with Aunt Caroline's love.'

"She was silent for a long time, her eyes looking far back, I am sure, into her own childhood days, for presently she sighed and said, 'Young man,'—she always called me that—'young man, I've been a fool. I should have had the child come to live with me; it would have been such a comfort to watch her break a few things now and then. I really think I should have helped her crack some myself.'"

The pleasant voice paused, and the young man seemed to slip away into a reverie with lips and eyes smiling as though his thoughts were about something very nice and agreeable,

as no doubt they were. But Fairy Dell was on tenterhooks of expectation and impatience, and just as it seemed impossible to stand the suspense another minute, a sudden thought popped into her head.

"If you please," she said timidly, touching the young man on the arm, "while you are thinking hadn't I better go change my dress? Then we'll be all ready to start. It's getting late."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the young man, coming back to Fairy Dell and Aunt Emmy's best room with a start. "Where are we off to all of a sudden, my dear?"

"Why—the attic, of course," said Fairy Dell. "Aren't we going to-night?"

"Hardly to-night," replied the young man, shaking his head. "It's a hundred miles from here; besides, you will have to pack up all the things in this house to send away, for when you do go it will be for good. I'm sorry, but you can't get into that wonderful attic for at least a week. Just think of the fun you will have thinking about it."

"I know," sighed Fairy Dell; "it's just like one time when I was sick and had a beautiful box of chocolates given to me. Doctor Tom said I couldn't eat 'em, so they put 'em on the bureau where I could look at 'em,

and they kept my mouth watering for a whole week. Honest, I was sicker because I couldn't have 'em. It's no fun; not for children anyhow."

Just then Ogre Bill came in from waiting on customers in the shop, and Fairy Dell flew into his arms, hugging, kissing, and patting him all at once.

"Just think, Ogre Bill Bellbounce!" she cried out, her eyes shining like starry sapphires, "I've got a new dead aunt, an attic, a brass key, and ten thousand dollars! And we're all going to live in the country, you, and Aunt Emmy—— Say, where is Aunt Emmy?"

Ogre Bill chuckled and winked roguishly at the young man.

"Well, you see, Fairy Dell, this was rather sudden for all of us," said Bill with a grin, "and your Aunt Emmy got a headache trying to count ten thousand on her fingers, so——"

"None of your nonsense, William Bellbounce," warned a mild unruffled voice, "or you'll get what-for. Just wait till my hands are clear."

Aunt Emmy, smiling, stout, and placid, with cheeks red as cherries from the kitchen fire, came in bearing a tray loaded with cups—her very best china—filled with tea black enough

and strong enough to float an egg, a huge plate of delicious toasted English muffins, a pat of butter, a pot of cream, and a little jar of marmalade, together with plates and napery and silver.

"A party!" almost shrieked Fairy Dell. "Goody! Ain't it funny how people always want to eat when they're happy? I'm starved."

And a merry party it was. The young man declared that he wasn't a bit hungry, but Aunt Emmy felt highly complimented when the muffins on his side of the plate lasted no time at all. In spite of her declaration that she was starved, Fairy Dell was altogether too excited to eat; there was so much to find out, so many questions to ask about the big house and Aunt Caroline—and didn't she ask them! Her Aunt Emmy was quite scandalized.

"Dear me, child," she protested at last, "your tongue is hung in the middle and you're fidgetting about like a toad under a harrow. You won't sleep a wink this night, and well I know it."

"Sleep!" cried Fairy Dell. "How could I sleep to-night? I want to lie awake and dream with my eyes open, and tell the little thin moon, and the winking stars, and the night winds, and the pigeons under the eaves,

and the cop on the beat, and the milkman's horse, and the sun when it paints the sky red at dawn that there is a little girl in Prettyman's Court so happy that she is staying awake all night long just to think about it. Glory! Just think—one whole long night of nothing but happiness!"

"Aye, child, it's wonderful," said Ogre Bill. "And mind, if you want to share it with any one, I shouldn't wonder a bit if you'd find Ogre Bill sitting out on the front steps dreaming dreams and waiting up for the Good Fairy. I've a word of thanks for her pretty little ear should she chance this way."

Aunt Emmy threw up her hands and made a noise very much like a snort.

"You two and your fairies!" she exclaimed, rolling her eyes back in her head like a great wax doll. "Bill Bellbounce, will you never grow up?"

"God forbid!" said Ogre Bill. "I've just managed the growing young. You'll not be going, sir?"

The young man was on his feet and evidently looking about for his hat. Fairy Dell's heart fluttered, turned over, and sank. With childish unreason she had accepted him as a permanency along with Aunt Caroline's attic, and here he was going away already! She

wondered how she could possibly endure without him, and life grew blank and drab; the sun shone no more. He didn't seem to care either, smiling and saying good-bye to Ogre Bill and Aunt Emmy without a tremble in his voice. And then, all at once, things grew bright and rosy again.

"I'll see you in the morning," he was saying. "I want to get you all away from here just as soon as we can manage it."

He turned to Fairy Dell and lifted her up and up until her eyes were on a level with his own, and then he kissed her.

"Good-night, little Fairy Queen," he whispered softly. "Sleep well, and may all your dreams come true. It's good for folks to be young and dream dreams—don't you and Ogre Bill *dare* to grow up!"

She shook her head. "I never will," she said confidently. "But I like grown-ups."

"And now for a promise," he went on smilingly, but she could tell by his eyes that he was in earnest. "I want you to promise you won't say 'darn' any more—it's such an ugly word on a fairy's pretty red lips. Will you?"

Fairy Dell pondered a moment.

"I'll try," she said slowly. "You see, it's such an awful slippery word and might pop out before I could stop it. But I *will* try."

"Splendid!" said the young man. "Nothing could be fairer."

And then he was gone. He had kissed her! Fairy Dell sat down on the steps and was sure that Prettyman's Court had never looked so nice before. 'Tino Pitzi, the hunchback, shuffled by, and Fairy Dell smiled at him and felt sorry for him.

"Hello, 'Tino," she said sweetly. "Nice day."

'Tino swung around.

"No 'fraid any more, Fairee?" he grinned with a flash of strong white teeth, and his flaming Evil Eye was as soft and gentle as a spaniel's. "I lika you no be 'fraid."

"Not any more, 'Tino," she assured him, a look of saint-like exaltation on her face. "Not a darned—excuse me!—not for a minute."

"Tha's all right." 'Tino turned away. "So long, Fairee!"

Ogre Bill came out with his pipe and sat down beside her.

"It's a wonderful thing that's come to you, Fairy Dell," he said after a long silence. "You're rich. Aren't you glad?"

"I don't know," came the amazing answer.

"You don't know?" cried Ogre Bill.

"I don't know," she repeated. "It's got to be some attic to make up for losing Prettyman's Court, and Granny Clinkinbeard, and the Concannon babies, and Petey Noseworthy, and poor lame Billy Smith—don't you see?"

"I see, Fairy Dell," said Ogre Bill with a slow nod of the head.

"Well, I'll have to think it over," said the child gravely. "A whole street full of friends is worth more'n a million attics, unless ——"

Ogre Bill smoked on, saying nothing, curious to see what her little puzzled brain would make of the great question. At last all the wrinkles cleared from her frowning brow and a great sigh burst from her.

"Ogre Bill, how silly of us not to think of it before!" she cried happily. "We'll take the ten thousand dollars and move the whole crowd up there—that gives us the attic too."

"One or two at a time for a visit. It's not such a bad idea," said Ogre Bill. "Where are you going?"

"Over to invite Billy Smith," said Fairy Dell. "He'd love Aunt Caroline's attic. I'm going to show him the key."

III

HER MAJESTY'S DEPARTURE

WHEN Fairy Dell opened her eyes in the morning it was because Ogre Bill, below in the shop, was pounding pegs into the shoes of Prettyman's Court, and making a great racket at it. She lay half awake and looked out of the window at a patch of blue sky, crossed by telephone wires, upon which two gossipy street sparrows were chattering and scolding at each other at a great rate—so much like Mrs. Concannon and Maggie McShane neighbouring over the back-porch railing, that she wondered what the argument was about this time. She chuckled drowsily at the conceit, and snuggled down in the pillows with a delicious sense of comfort and well-being; it seemed very certain that for some reason this morning was different from all other mornings in her life, and yet she couldn't tell just why. She seemed to be floating in crystal happiness, holy and set

apart from the world in a sort of beautiful temple—solemnly enraptured and consecrated. A spell was upon her as she lay on the drowsy borderland of consciousness, and then a beautiful smile began and gradually changed her adorable little face.

"Oh!" she cried in rosy confusion. "He kissed me!"

Fairy Dell looked out at the sky, flushed and glowing with the strangely sweet memory, and her eyes were as bright as shoe-buttons, her thoughts racing back over the great events which had made yesterday a red-letter day, like the Sundays and holidays on a calendar.

"Some day, I'll say!" she murmured. "Heavenly!"

Thud! Thud! Thud!

All this time the thump of Ogre Bill's hammer had been coming right up through the floor, as regularly as the tick of a clock, without the slightest notice from Fairy Dell, because it was part of her every-day existence. But now!

She hopped out of bed and ran to the head of the stairs.

"Ogre Bill!" she called. "Ogre Bill Bell-*bounce!* Hey, Bill!"

In great haste Ogre Bill appeared at the

foot of the stairs, a shoe in one hand, a hammer in the other.

"Whatever do you want?" he said as distinctly as any one could with a mouth full of shoe-pegs. "What is it, child?"

"You're not to peg another shoe!" she commanded. "Understand? — not another one! The idea! Here I've got ten thousand dollars, and you're mending shoes. Send 'em back—every one! Get Petey Noseworthy to take 'em."

Ogre Bill smiled fondly and shook his head.

"No, child," he said moistly, and lost out a couple of shoe-pegs, "I'll finish them. If—if you don't mind, I'd like to. They're the last ones I'll do, and"—here the shoe-pegs peppered the floor like rice—"I'd love to do it for the dear, good people. We're going away, you know, Fairy Dell, and I shall miss the friendly shoes, I'm thinking."

"Ah!" cried Fairy Dell softly. "I know, Bill. Your heart comes right up in your mouth, and your eyes sting like the dickens!"

Bill went back to his bench, and Fairy Dell sat on the side of the bed soberly thinking it all over. Somehow it wasn't going to be so easy after all. It is quite difficult for a queen to step down from her throne and lay aside her crown over night, even for a fairy queen;

it leaves the kingdom so at sixes and sevens, and of course no queen could possibly be so flinty-hearted as not to think of the welfare of her fairy subjects. Fairy Dell puckered up her lips and wrinkled her brows, with the effort of trying to feel perfectly at ease about going away from Prettyman's Court. She was such a lovable, affectionate child that it made her problem a very hard one indeed, and it was going to tug mightily at her heart-strings to leave all the precious friends who loved her, and whom she loved so well. Somehow she felt that her good fortune was almost a misfortune; she could not make it seem quite right that she should be going to such a marvellous place as Aunt Caroline's all alone. Deep down in her generous little heart, she wanted everybody in Prettyman's Court to go along and share its delights with her. But what could be done about it?

Her blue eyes were wet with tears as she pulled on a stocking.

"It spoils everything," she whimpered. "I feel just as if I was—sneaking!"

Suddenly she slipped to her knees beside the bed and rested her golden head in her hands.

"Oh, God," she prayed with childish directness, "I'm in trouble. I'm going away from Prettyman's Court, and I want you to give

particular attention to it, and to sick old Granny Clinkinbeard, and poor, lame Billy Smith, and Eileen Concannon, and to Petey Noseworthy. They need somebody to look after them all the time, and I won't be here. Thank you very much. Amen!"

She perched on the edge of the bed again, and reached for the other stocking in much better spirits.

"There," she said quite cheerfully, "that's the best I can do."

The whole world looked different. The sunshine was glorious. The patch of high, blue sky framed by the window seemed immeasurably deep, and a flock of pigeons, joyously wheeling and tumbling about in the far distance, shone like flecks of living silver when the sun burnished their wings. Her imagination was enkindled and she tried to picture Aunt Caroline's lying placidly under the same azure sky so far away; whole fields white with daisies; mile after mile of golden-rod yellowing the hedgerows along the white, winding roads; the fresh winds sweeping through billowing fields of grain, like waves on the restless sea; the air freighted with the smell of new-turned earth, the fragrance of curing hay mingled with sweet-fern, and the rich, fruity odour of apples; with myriads of

butterflies dancing in the sunlight, and bees humming in the clover, and the cloying note of thrushes calling at dusk.

"Well," she cried at last, "I suppose I've got to do it, and there ain't any use mugging about it. Aunt Caroline wanted me to have that place, and you simply can't go back on a dead aunt."

She began to sing like a lark at sunrise, which was exactly what she should have done the moment she opened her eyes. But down in Prettyman's Court her loyal subjects were not carolling like skylarks. Petey Noseworthy and lame Billy Smith were dolefully discussing the calamity which had befallen the Court when Goldie Alpert came skipping blithely along the sidewalk, and even as she ran she could read that something was terribly amiss with her friends. She stopped and grinned at them.

"My word!" said Goldie. "What's the matter?"

"Oh, don't you know?" said Billy. "Fairy Dell's going to move away from here."

"She ain't never!" cried Goldie, aghast.

"She is, too," asserted Petey Noseworthy, his lip trembling. "She's goin' away for good. Can you beat it! Fairy Dell's goin' away forever."

"Is she, Billy?" appealed Goldie in desperation. "Honest?"

Billy Smith's eyes swam with hot tears and a bothersome lump rose in his throat.

"I hate it!" he snivelled, twitching about on his crutches and making a sudden swipe at his nose with a convenient sleeve. "She is the only one in Prettyman's who is always kind to me. Gosh! She lets me be King of the Fairies an' wear a crown an' everything 'cause I'm lame and been laid up in the hospittle."

"And lookit!" By way of emphasis Petey poked a very dirty forefinger under Billy Smith's snivelling nose so fiercely that it looked very much as though he intended an immediate assault. "Granny Clinkinbeard cried all night long and says she knows all the skin'll be scraped off'n her back now that Fairy Dell's goin' away. And Missus Concannon threw her apern over her bean an' bawled for fair—she says all the luck's gone with that angel lost to Prettyman's Court, an'——"

A vigorous yank twirled Petey right-about-face and he found himself staring past a pair of bony fists into the blazing eyes of a slender stranger who carried his body with peculiar rigidity.

"You let Billy Smith alone, or I'll smash you," he threatened, determination in every line of his pale, delicate features. "You make me sick, picking on a kid just out of the hospittle."

"Oh, Tug!—Tug Wilson!" shrieked Billy Smith. "Don't fight! You're just out of the hospittle yourself—you'll break your plaster cast, and twist your spine again."

With the uncanny agility of crippled children he scuttled over to Tug's side and took him by the hand.

"It's all right, Tug," he laughed tremulously. "Petey wasn't doin' a thing. He's a friend of mine—we're all friends here in Prettyman's Court—and I want you to like him." He turned to the others. "This is Tug Wilson," he said proudly. "He had the cot next to mine in the hospittle, and his back's all twisted outa shape and he's got a plaster cast on what weighs a ton."

"Lemme feel of it?" asked Petey hopefully.

"Sure," said Tug willingly. "Hit me here."

He thrust out his chest and Petey doubled up his fist and banged Tug a good one.

"Ouch!" yelped Petey, rubbing his knuckles and gazing admiringly at Tug. "Say, do

you sleep with that stone shirt on?—every night?"

"Yep," grinned Tug.

Petey whistled through his teeth. "Ain't that the limit! Feel of him, Goldie—you couldn't dent him with a pickaxe!"

With frank curiosity Goldie explored one side of Tug while Petey prodded exploring fingers into the other side.

"Say," exploded Petey, "how do you scratch yourself when you get a bite?"

"Aw, Petey," cried Billy Smith, "how do you suppose anything could bite him through that? Why, they have to *saw* casts off'n you, and it takes hours and hours, don't it, Tug?"

Tug nodded. "Sure," he agreed. "But, say, Billy, what were you crying about if Petey wasn't doing anything?" He looked Billy over anxiously. "Your hip ain't hurtin' you again, is it?"

"Oh, no, Tug," assured Billy; "it wasn't that—I almost wish it was my hip, 'cause that can be fixed. You see, we were just talking and feeling sorry and crying on account of Fairy Dell's going ever and ever so far away to live."

"It's a hunderd miles!" chimed in Petey importantly. "And if you only knew Fairy Dell and the corking games she plans for us to

play—all about fairies and giants and elves and fays ——"

"And nymphs and sprites!" interjected Billy Smith excitedly. "Oh, Tug, you ought to see her when she's Queen Titania!—she's prettier than Nursey Whalen! And she lets me be King of the Fairies because I can't climb trees or dance."

"Well," said Tug, "what's she want to go away for?"

"Lookit!" cried Petey. "There he is—the emissionary of the Good Fairy—standing on Bellbounce's steps. He's the guy what give Fairy Dell a dead aunt, and a attic, and ten thousand dollars. She's goin' to live in the attic and do nothing but spend the money."

"Ain't he beautiful!" sighed Goldie soulfully. "Look at them eyes of his'n! Lovely feet, too!"

"Lovely nothin'!—I'd like to paste him one," said Petey fiercely. "Why didn't he keep his old attic and leave us Fairy Dell, the old smarty."

"You're a bum sport," declared Tug in open disgust. "Gee! if I knew anybody like Fairy Dell, and a guy did anything like that for her I'd give him a medal, instead of pasting him. Another thing. You're going to

spoil all this kid's fun in going away, acting so nasty. Why don't you do something to show her how glad you are because *she's* glad?"

Petey Noseworthy looked at him—into his indignant, scornful eyes.

"That's true," he said honestly. "I was thinking only of us."

"I know!" cried Goldie Alpert. "A present!—we'll give her a present like we give dear teacher in school before examinations so she'll feel good for us already."

"Oh, boy!" exclaimed Petey. "I got two cents."

"I got three," said Billy.

Goldie swiftly did a sum in mental arithmetic. "I only got a cent," she announced dejectedly. "But I got a bag of rags and some bottles—maybe two cents' worth."

"A collection!" whooped Petey. "Every guy in the Court'll chip in. What'll we buy? Gosh! maybe we'll get enough to buy a knife with a corkscrew in it."

"How do you get that way?" jeered Tug. "A corkscrew for a girl!"

"I don't care," said Petey stubbornly, "if you want a corkscrew you got to have it, even if you are a girl. I bet she'd like one."

"I wish we could think of something

pretty," said Billy wistfully. "A book maybe."

"In school she sees enough books already," objected Goldie. "Down to the Star Bargain Store, in the basement, I seen a picture of a angel sitting on a rock with a harp. She was beautiful for a dollar."

"Say," suggested Tug practically, "why don't you take up your collection first, so you'll know where you're at?"

They all laughed and agreed that this was the only sensible thing to do, and trooped off together, noisily declaring that the whole matter was to be kept a dead secret. But the best part of it all was that they were so busy with their great plan that they quite forgot to be sad any longer, and the day became bright and sunshiny again for them too. Indeed, they were altogether radiant when, late that afternoon, the entire list of subscribers—a host!—sneaked out of Prettyman's Court by way of the hole in Mike Tierney's board-fence and descended on the Star Bargain Store. The sum of one dollar and three cents reposed in the jealously guarding palm of Goldie Alpert. Billy Smith swung along on his crutches at her right hand, Petey Noseworthy on her left; and they were all beaming.

It was a very fortunate thing indeed that they were so forehanded about it, for that very morning the young man decided to advance the departure to the next day. Such confusion as there was then! Ogre Bill pegged and wax-ended shoes like mad, declaring that he wouldn't move a single step until every shoe and slipper was done and safely delivered. Nor did he—and not one penny would he accept in payment.

"Nay, nay! not a cent!" he protested when Mrs. Concannon insisted upon paying for five little pairs of mended shoes. "Go away now, dear woman, before I blubber like a great fool."

He quite roared at her, and she stumbled down the shop steps screwing the corner of her apron into her eyes.

"God bless such fools as you, Bill," she called back chokingly. "You and yours!"

Aunt Emmy and Fairy Dell were in a ferment of excitement and work. Even the next morning Fairy Dell had scarcely a moment to devote to her friends, who hung about the doors in a weird state of excitement. They giggled and snickered and whispered and rushed out of the way again and rushed in the way again, until Fairy Dell thought they were altogether out of their heads—as indeed they

were. Finally the last trunk was locked, and the final nail was driven into the very last packing case, and the very last bundle was tied, and Ogre Bill straightened his aching back for the last time and declared that if there was another thing for them to carry they wouldn't be able to move a step, and that was all there was to it! And then the young man arrived with cabs to take them and their luggage to the station.

Fairy Dell had been so busy that she was really startled when Ogre Bill said it was time to put on her hat.

"Oh!" she said, and was amazed to find herself standing in an empty house; not a home at all—just doors and walls and windows and floors and ceilings. The smell of leather came in through the open shop door, and she ran in there sniffing with a gone, homesick feeling inside.

"Good-bye! Good-bye!" she cried, her voice echoing hollowly in the vacant place. "Why, it's dead! Whoever would believe that a home could die so soon, and just be a house! I can't stay here!"

She fled through the dismantled rooms out into the sunshine of Prettyman's Court and into the presence of many loving friends and loyal subjects. She stopped, round-eyed and

startled, and drew in her breath, for the dear, familiar faces shone with such eager anticipation that she somehow knew that something momentous was about to happen. And then she became aware of Goldie Alpert and Petey Noseworthy right in front of her holding a big tray on which reposed a glass pitcher and six glasses. But such a pitcher and such glasses! They were of clear white glass, although it was almost impossible to see any of the clear glass on account of the profusion of bright blue violets and salmon-coloured roses and shiny green leaves with which they were decorated. They were as natural as anything and you could tell what they were the moment you looked at them. Fairy Dell thought she had never seen anything so perfectly beautiful.

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried, clasping her hands to her breast. "Ain't they peachy!"

Billy Smith hitched himself forward on his crutches and opened his mouth and shut it again two or three times in succession, but not one single word could he say until Tug Wilson—who had come up to see the fun—leaned over and whispered in Billy's ear, with as prompt results as though he had pressed a button.

"Dear Fairy Dell," recited Billy in a shrill,

strained voice, "these presents are from all us kids in Prettyman's Court and we give 'em to you because we love you. We're goin' to miss —to miss you—like—like everything, but we're glad you're goin' to be glad, and—and"—his eyes streamed tears and his skinny throat worked convulsively as he tried to stifle the rising sobs—"and—and there's lots more—but—but I can't say it!"

Fairy Dell did not move, but she just looked. There was nothing else she could do, no matter how much she wanted to. She caught her breath in a short gasp and felt herself turn pale. It was too much. She just stood there—straight and lithe and lovely—her head thrown back and her blue eyes deep humid pools of wondrous tenderness, her arms stretched forth as though to embrace them every one.

"I love you!" she said very slowly in order to speak at all, and then wildly through a sudden rush of tears, "I love you! and love you! and love you! Good-bye!"

With a choking sob she flung down the steps and ran to the waiting cab, to throw herself on the cushions. And Prettyman's Court understood, and wept with her.

Ogre Bill's face was wet with tears as he plucked at the young man's sleeve.

"Whatever will we do with the presents?" he asked anxiously. "We've more than we can carry now—and here's a deal of glass."

"Take 'em, of course," replied the young man, and to himself, "I wouldn't leave the dear, ugly things if we have to abandon everything else." He handed three flowery tumblers to Aunt Emmy, three to Ogre Bill, and took the pitcher himself. "Into the cab with you," he cried. "Be quick! I can't stand much more of this myself."

The carriage doors slammed, the cabbies climbed up to their seats, shook out their reins, cracked their whips, and in a moment they were rolling away from the fluttering handkerchiefs of Prettyman's Court.

IV

THE WONDERFUL ATTIC

FAIRY DELL knew Aunt Caroline's instantly—a great white house lifting four broad red chimneys among lordly trees whose topmost branches rose high above the roof, and she caught glimpses of the red-roofed barn through the green leaves, and discovered the stone curbing of a well with a long sweep. At first Fairy Dell thought that there was no one alive about the place, but her sharp eyes made out a thin plume of blue smoke issuing from the red chimney nearest the barn, and it made the whole place seem different and homelike. The blue wood-smoke was as cheery and hospitable as a welcoming handclasp.

"It's alive!" she whispered. "How sweet!"

They drove into the grassy door-yard, and stopped before the broad entrance door with a big, brass knocker and a fanlight over it and

long narrow windows on either side; but Fairy Dell got out and ran along to the kitchen door, and there on the step was dozing a Maltese cat with a fluffy kitten with four white feet and a white nose beside her. In an instant the kitten was in Fairy Dell's arms.

"You darling!" she cried; and the kitten purred back something of the same sort.

She heard a strange voice and turned to see a short, round, jolly-looking man who was just telling Ogre Bill that he was Jotham Stubbs, their next-door neighbour, and had been looking after the place for the young man.

"Glad to see you," he said genially. "Fine farm. Good crops. Nice catch of hay this year."

Fairy Dell put the kitten down beside its mother and slipped inside the house. Thrusting her hand inside her blouse she pulled on a blue ribbon, and out came the big brass key! Her heart beat madly against her ribs and her eyes shone and there wasn't any breath in her lungs as she stole on tiptoe through room after room and up the silent stairs to the second story. All the doors were shut, and she tried one door and found it led to a bedroom, and went out through another door

that opened in to a clothes-press, and went back and came into the hall again, and tried another which opened on a short flight of steps and along a short corridor, and up some more steps. She was growing bewildered and a little timid, almost fearing to lose herself in such a maze of rooms and steps and corridors, when, all at once, she stood before a door which she knew was the attic door as certainly as though there had been a huge sign on it.

There was the keyhole—an inviting keyhole!—and it was just the size it ought to be. She put in the brass key and turned it with a little grating noise. She took a long breath and turned the knob slowly—oh, so slowly! Then she opened the door and slipped through it, with shining eyes and breathing very fast with the excitement of the tremendous moment, as she mounted the stairs to the very top.

She was standing *inside Aunt Caroline's attic!*

Her roving eyes missed nothing in that wide, mysterious place, ranging quickly over cedar chests, and long boxes, some bound with iron, some with brass, wicker baskets, bamboo trunks with canvas casings, steamer trunks, big square trunks, and boxes and

barrels, ever so many. Fairy Dell tried to imagine what was in this box, in that trunk, in the green, brass-bound chest with "Lorenzo Biggs" in white letters marked on the end. She knew that all she had to do was to walk over and open them to find out, but it was delightful fun to stand there and just guess.

"How still it is!" she whispered, "creepy and—sort of spooky. No wonder! The last person in here was my dead aunt. Gosh!"

The room had been closed so long that the air was heavy with the mingled odours of sandalwood and incense and cedar and camphor. Fairy Dell sniffed.

"Smells just like a drug-store," she thought, twisting her head around for a view of the rest of the attic. "Oh!" she shrieked. "Oh, my goodness!"

She was gazing with dilated eyes at a hideous devil-mask which hung over a wide fireplace, and the thing seemed to leer at her out of its eyeless sockets. Fairy Dell gulped once or twice, and then grinned foolishly and stuck out her tongue at the mask.

"Think you're smart, old False Face, don't you!" she said a bit unsteadily. "Well, let me tell you there are better-looking ones than you in the five-and-ten—for a nickel!"

A row of ugly idols and squat, fat Buddhas, and figurines, and monkeys, and ivory elephants, stretched along the mantel-shelf, and above them were suspended wicked, twisty-bladed knives from Malay, bolos from the Philippines, machetes from Cuba, and spears with iron and bone heads, long, broad blades of swordfish crossing the jagged weapons of sawfish, short swords from China and Japan, long sinister stilettos, ugly dirks, and heavy war-clubs fantastically carved and decorated. Fairy Dell thought they looked altogether too murderous for comfort. And then she saw a lacquer box at the center of the shelf with the tiniest key in the lock and a white tag hanging from the key. She looked at the tag, and the knives, and shot an uneasy glance at the devil-mask before her curiosity finally marched her feet over to the fireplace. It was a large tag and the writing was so plain that Fairy Dell read it without any trouble. This is what it said:

"Dear Niece:—The keys to all the trunks and chests are inside this box and marked as plainly as an old lady's crooked fingers could manage it. I hope you will have a glorious time in this attic, dear child I've never seen. Deary me! As I write I try to picture you—tall and slender and graceful and fair. I am

sure—poking about among my treasures. I try to imagine the colour of your hair—and of your eyes. But all my faded old eyes can see is my own self as a slip of a girl—the homely, unhappy little ghost of me—and it makes me sad to think that I have never seen you—and never will! Think kindly of a lonely old woman—but a loving one!—and treasure your golden childhood, which is a gift greater than all the riches of the world. Good-bye, my dear—oh, good-bye! With all my love.

"AUNT CAROLINE."

"The poor old thing! Poor Aunt Caroline!" said Fairy Dell in a whisper. She sniffed, and gulped, and dabbed at her eyes. "Gosh! this is a teary old world! But everybody is so good to me I can't kick."

The lacquer box had somehow opened in her hand and her fingers were closing about the keys. Fairy Dell couldn't make up her mind which to open first, the bamboo trunk or Lorenzo Biggs' green chest; and then the question decided itself. She pulled out a key and looked at the tag—the bamboo!

"Of course!" she laughed—the first time she had laughed since she had set foot in the attic, and that was a long time for Fairy Dell. "What a goony I am!"

In went the key without another moment's

hesitation and up went the lid of the bamboo trunk with a jerk that meant business.

"Silk!" she breathed as her fingers slid under the folds of tissue paper on top. "Silk! —after a life of gingham and muslins!—Oh, glory!" She pulled out the whispering fabric and rubbed it against her cheek. "Silk!" she cried again. "Why, it's a coat—with ivory buttons—and such a bee-yootiful purple. And here's pink pants—silk too—I know!—the Chinese women wear 'em—but they've got nothing on me."

Slipping out of her dress and petticoats she put on the pink trousers and mandarin's purple coat, which was so big that she had to turn up the sleeves; a round cap of green silk with a red button on top fitted tightly over her golden head, and blue slippers with silver-gilt embroidery graced her feet. And then of course she seized a fan and paraded up and down the attic once or twice—a quaint, sweet little figure!—before she did another thing. Then off went the purple coat and on went a magnificent robe of peachblow silk with golden dragons crawling all over it.

"Oh, joy!" she squealed. "If Goldie Albert ever saw me in this I bet you could pick off her eyes as easy as grapes—and I wish she was here this minute. More silk—a million

yards. And lace—it's a shawl. Wouldn't Granny Clinkinbeard look swell lying in bed with that around her head that ain't got any more hair on it than a teacup. What do you know!—here's a box of tea—Oolong something-or-other. Now that's where Granny lives, and she shall have some of it."

All the while her eager fingers were hauling out and tossing aside wonderfully beautiful and curious things. They were in such profusion that she simply could not spend the time to look at them very long with all the other treasure-chests awaiting their turn.

"The bottom!" she said presently, fishing out another key and looking at the tag. "Gee! 'To be opened the very last'—must be something special like the last piece of fireworks when they set off a lot of bombs and a picture of the President. I've got to hurry to see what it is."

Lorenzo Biggs' green sea-chest came next, and at first it was a bit disappointing, although Fairy Dell loved the tarry whiff that came out when she lifted the lid; it smelled of the sea and made her think of Aunt Caroline's tales of yellow pirates, and wrecks, and things. Fairy Dell really couldn't be expected to be interested in a lot of old letters and documents and ship-chandler's receipts, and

she was just feeling for another key when she spied a thick, stubby book with "Log of the Grey Wing" printed on the cover.

"What a funny name for a book," she thought as she picked it up.

The book opened of its own accord and a sheet of paper—a closely-written letter—lay before her eyes, and Fairy Dell almost jumped out of her skin when she saw her own name. It was uncanny and weird and gave her the strangest creepy feeling.

"My word!" she gasped. "What's this!"

"Dear Caroline:—"—the letter ran—"At last I am working again, and you don't know how good it seems to be back with Bob. I love the life—it must be in the blood. A gipsy strain must be in the family somewhere, with you sailing all over the globe in ships while I'm on the go the year round almost. I wouldn't change for the world either. The baby is with me—a dear, sweet, little honey-bunch!—and she seems to like the life as much as I do. She is a great pet with everybody—they call her Fairy Dell to tell her from me. It was sweet of you to write—the first letter from any of the home folks since I was married, except one from Bill after Fairy Dell was born. Bill is a good sort. Good-bye. We all send love. Your affectionate sister

"DELL."

"P. S. I almost forgot to thank you for the queer, pretty green pendant you sent the baby from China. She wears it round her neck always."

Unconsciously Fairy Dell's fingers stole up to touch the beautiful piece of jade at her throat.

"My mother wrote that letter—and I'm in it!" she exclaimed in amazement. "Well, what do you know about that!—two letters in one afternoon and both from dead people!—and I never had a real live letter in my life! Little girls are awful lucky to have mothers and fathers to love 'em by mail when they can't be there to do it regular. I'm out of luck that way, but I've got Ogre Bill and Aunt Emmy, thank goodness! and they're very satisfactory indeed." Out came another key and she glanced at the tag. "Oho!—the leather one!"

Nobody on earth could possibly tell all the delightful things that Fairy Dell found in Aunt Caroline's attic that afternoon, or the fun she had dressing up in silks and satins and laces. She changed her costume no less than four times, not counting the peachblow robe with the golden dragons and the pink, silk trousers and the green cap with the red button on top. But the Princess was the best of

all. She wore a stunning Leghorn hat with a bright crimson ostrich plume stuck on one side and a gorgeous orange one on the other, and a draped skirt of peacock-blue-and-silver brocade with a very long train, and she didn't need a waist because she had a marabout scarf about her neck and used a delicate lace shawl over a piece of canary-coloured silk very effectively as a mantle.

A frantic search through three trunks failed to unearth a coveted pair of silver slippers and she was forced to fall back on some quilted Nile-green comfy ones, which did very nicely; and a dainty white parasol of silk and lace and a mother-of-pearl handle was the last word in quiet elegance. Such mincing, and pirouetting, and curtseying, and airs you never saw, as she promenaded the length of the glittering palace ballroom on the arm of her royal father His Majesty the King.

She haughtily declined to dance with three dukes, one right after the other.

"Not so's you'd notice it, my good Duke of Indigo," she refused coldly; "not a chance—the dickens with this train!—it's tripped me four times!" She gave it a vicious kick that straightened it out like a whiplash, and turned again to the duke. "Forty minutes late, fair sir. My enamelled suitor the belted Earl of

Faro—he's really my applianced husband, but Queen Evangeline—that's mother—she says it must be a family secret yet, and so—well, there's nothing doing! The belted—I wonder why earls always wear belts—the belted earl has beat you to it. *Good*-evening, duke."

Away went the lacey parasol, off went the Leghorn hat, down slipped the mantilla, one lusty kick released the bothersome brocade skirt and she flung herself down on a heap of soft, yielding fabrics in a perfect transport of delight.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she sighed. "This has got Mike Tierney's back lot skun a million miles! And I can do it every day—it's *mine!* My dear attic! I wish I could give Aunt Caroline a smacking big kiss and a hug and —and—another kiss!"

She lay comfortably languid and looked about her at the confusion of riches, the riot of colour a pleasure to the eye as the golden rays streaming through the western windows flooded them with living light. Her fingers loved the whispering silk under their touch and the smoothness of the satins and the heavy softness of the velvet pile.

"I suppose Petey Noseworthy and Billy Smith 'll want to fight duels and kill pirates

with those nasty knives and cut themselves and stick holes in each other with those hateful spears," she thought drowsily, "but I won't let 'em! Gettin' blood all over everything—not much! Maybe there's blood on the horrid things now! Gee! I wonder if anybody ever was killed with 'em—they've got red spots on 'em! I'd sort of like to be a man once in a while. Funny what makes 'em want to fight all the time."

She sat bolt upright and scrambled about tossing silks and satins everywhere in search of the lacquer box, which was found at last under the purple mandarin's coat with the carved ivory buttons.

"The most important one!" she scolded. "And to think I went and forgot it!"

It wasn't a trunk at all, but a cedar chest, highly polished, and not very large. Still, Fairy Dell opened it more eagerly than she had any of the others.

"Another letter!" she snickered at the sight of an envelope lying within. "Gracious! this is a regular post-office!"

But it sobered her face and made her more sorry than ever for Aunt Caroline when she read the solitary line of writing—such a pathetic little message for any one to have to write: "These things were for the little girl

of my own I always hoped to have and never did."

"Just like Jed Pim," she thought. "Poor Jed always wanted one, too, and never did."

Her fingers were as busy as her thoughts and in a twinkling all the previous delight and pleasure faded to nothing before the supreme joy which now ran through every fibre of her tingling body. It was almost too great to bear, and her hands trembled as she reached down and lifted out a flaxen-haired doll half as big as Fairy Dell herself; and as she slowly raised it in her mothering arms the eyelids opened and eyes as blue as her own looked out at her.

"Good-afternoon, Caroline," said Fairy Dell sweetly. "What a lovely sleep you've had, honey. Want mother to dress you, dear? All right, mother will. Let's see—what dress shall we put on mother's darling baby?"

And that *was* a problem. The little cedar chest was so full of the most cunning little petticoats, and slips, and tiny stockings, and slippers and bootees, and night-dresses with lace and pink and blue ribbons and hats and caps and bonnets and "Tams," and pinafores and kimonos and gingham dresses and party dresses, and serge coats and silk and satin

dresses, and coral necklaces and beads and handkerchiefs and shawls and bracelets and little parasols and cute little bottles of perfume and trinkets—so many beautiful things that any mother must surely ponder over which was the very prettiest thing to put on her baby.

Fairy Dell selected a silk dress with very small blue-and-white checks and a sash with a smashing big bow, and light-blue stockings and dear little blue kid slippers with two straps that buttoned, and a hat of blue organdie with knots of blue silk ribbon and forget-me-nots peeping out from the ruffles. She had just finished tying the strings under Caroline's chin when she heard a noise and turned to find Aunt Emmy and Ogre Bill standing in the doorway.

"Hello!" she cried, scrambling to her feet and running to them. "Look what I got—it'll shut its eyes and open 'em and move its legs and arms—and its name's Caroline! The darling!"

Ogre Bill smiled, but Aunt Emmy was staring past them into the great attic.

"What are all those beautiful things?" she asked breathlessly. "Land o' Love! I can't believe my eyes! Are they really ——"

"Oh, those things," said Fairy Dell with-

out even turning her head. "Why, they are just some silks and stuff Aunt Caroline's brought home from somewhere—pretty, too. But just look at this per-fectly bee-yootiful doll! And Bill! Aunt Caroline kept it for the very last thing—the tag on the key said, 'To be opened the very last.' And I waited."

She smiled at Ogre Bill and cuddled the doll close to her.

"Yes, sir! I waited," she told him again. "Gosh! it was like eating one of Aunt Emmy's cup-cakes, and saving the frosting to eat all by itself!"

"Just so!" said Ogre Bill. "I like 'em that way myself."

V

A BOY FOR A DAY

"WHOA, Shadrach!" Ogre Bill pulled Aunt Caroline's shaggy old white horse that looked like a Polar bear in close to the curb and sat shaking his head and staring at a great three-sheet poster with its bold, black type staring back at him from its vivid yellow background. His eyes shifted momentarily to the picture adjoining it depicting "The Only Blood-Sweating Hippopotamus in Captivity," and then morosely returned to dwell on the poster, which read:

COMING!!!
THE WORLD'S GREATEST SHOW
THE BACKUS LOT
LIMERICK, FRIDAY, JULY 19
COMING!!!

"She'll be here day after to-morrow," he muttered. "No stopping her either."

"Now what?" inquired a cheery voice at his elbow. "Nice face for a circus."

Ogre Bill turned to find the brown eyes of the young man laughing up at him.

"Oh, it's you!" said Ogre Bill glumly. "I was on my way to see you. It's about this circus."

"Is that all!" The young man clapped Bill on the shoulder and spun him around. "Look here, a circus isn't a funeral. From your face I thought maybe Fairy Dell had wrecked Aunt Caroline's attic, or the potato bugs weren't doing well, or something really serious like that had happened."

"There has," replied Bill, sober as a judge; "and I drove into town on purpose to tell you all about it. The wonder is that it hasn't happened before—every time I saw a circus bill I thought it would, and it never did. Now it has!"

"My word, Bill, you're as clear as mud!" exclaimed the young man. "The quicker you get this out of your system the better. Move over—I'm going to ride with you."

Bill slid over, and the young man mounted to the wagon seat beside him.

"Now then, what on earth is the matter with you?"

"It's the Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb," said

Bill, slapping Shadrach with the reins; "she ain't bigger'n half-pint of cider, but she's filled my world full of trouble. You remember my telling you all about Fairy Dell's father and mother being circus people, and how she travelled with the circus when she was nothing but a baby?"

The young man nodded. "Certainly," he responded; "also that you are mortally afraid that Fairy Dell will some day get a whiff of tanbark and run away with the circus. Bill, you're a foolish old thing. Will you tell me what harm it would do if the child actually went to see the circus? Do you suppose tanbark is something contagious? Nonsense. I'll tell you one thing—if you don't let her see a circus, she *will* run away. I would!"

Bill shook his obstinate head. "I'm afraid, and that's all there is to it. Maybe I'm wrong; most likely I am—but I want to keep it from the child that her parents were of the tanbark. And now I can't."

"Well, why not?—the Countess?"

"Yes; she's coming with the show Friday. I got a letter from her and she's crazy to see Fairy Dell. When we moved out here from Prettyman's Court, I wrote her all about Fairy Dell's wonderful good fortune and sent her a picture of the child and the house. You see?

She's coming Friday with her mind all made up, and even if she is a dwarf, and only two and a half feet high—ain't she a woman with her mind made up?"

The young man slapped his knee and made such a noise that Shadrach jumped as though he were shot.

"By George, you're right!" declared the young man with twinkling eyes. "Bill Bellbounce, you're a gonner! The Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb will see Fairy Dell as sure as shooting, and I'm glad of it; you'll find that your fears are all moonshine."

"That ain't all," said Bill dejectedly; "she wants to take Fairy Dell to the circus."

"Capital!" cried the young man. "What a golden day—her first circus! I envy Fairy Dell that."

"I haven't said she could go yet," growled Ogre Bill, trying to stifle a grin. "The Countess wants it to be a grand surprise; she doesn't want Fairy Dell to know a thing about it till she comes out to the farm after her."

"That will suit Fairy Dell to a 'T,'" declared the young man. "Bill, do you know that I rather like the Countess?"

"H'm!" said Bill without enthusiasm. "How is she going to find the farm?"

"That's so!" ejaculated the young man.

"Worried about it, aren't you? Well, that's my job—I'll show her."

"I thought you would," said Bill with a sigh of relief; "that's what I wanted to see you for. And would you mind asking her not to—well—not to tell Fairy Dell her father and mother were circus people? Maybe you can manage that for me."

"I'm ashamed of you for being so pig-headed, Bill, but I'll do my level best," laughed the young man. "Glad I met you. It means a day at the circus for me. Whoa, Shadrach! Take him back to Aunt Caroline's, where he can chase the doodle-bugs away from the punkins. I'm a busy man and can't be bothered with him another minute."

He jumped down from the wagon, waved his hand, and was gone before Ogre Bill gathered his wits together enough to thank him.

"A wonderful fine chap, that," muttered Bill as he drove along home; "always doing something for other folks and managing to get a lot of fun out of it too. With that smile, and the good looks of him, and his pleasant speech, he'll manage the Countess—if anybody can."

The upshot of the matter was that the young man was down at the Backus Lot bright and early Friday morning; so early that there wasn't another soul stirring in the house when

he slipped quietly out of the front door; so early that the eastern sky was just showing a soft, warm pink, and the robins were only beginning to pipe sleepy matins from the apple trees.

"Pshaw," he chuckled, "I never could sleep when there was a circus coming to town. Silly to stay thrashing around in bed."

Evidently there were others of the same mind, for about a minute later he was in violent collision with a youthful form, which catapulted through a gate like a shot from a gun.

"Hel-lo, Peg Packem!" he exclaimed, recognizing his next-door neighbour. "Going somewhere?"

"Sh-h!" hissed Peg, a look of agony on his face. "For the love of Kelly, don't wake Maw up! Don't you know *anything?*"

"Put your hands over your ears so you can't hear," whispered the young man, unconsciously clapping his hands over his own ears. "Come on!"

Together they sprinted out of range of Maw Packem's voice, and then slowed down to a walk for the simple reason that they were laughing so that they couldn't run.

"Gosh! you scared me," giggled Peg. "Does your mother know you flew the coop?"

"Not much, she doesn't," confessed the

young man; "if she's awake, she thinks I'm in bed. Look here, you young outlaw, did your mother tell you not to skip out this way?"

Peg snorted. "Nope. I never asked her. You know," he went on confidentially as they walked along, "mothers are awful funny about things; you ask 'em, and half the time they say 'No!' before they even know what you want to do. Ask Paw, and he says to ask Maw; so now I ain't running any chances—I beat it, and ask afterwards. Take this morning. If I'd of asked her, she'd of said, 'No, Peg dear'—she always says dear when I can't do it—'No, Peg dear, I'm afraid the lions'll get loose and eat you alive.' Now, you see, I can go home and just show her the lions didn't eat me, and maybe get a lickin'—but I've been! You know how it is."

"We-l-l, generally speaking, you ought to ask your mother first," hedged the young man; "perhaps on circus days ——"

"Betcha!" Peg nipped in with conviction, "boys have just got to see circuses come in. What d'you know! A pal of mine—Orph Smith—got caught readin' a dime novel, and his father made him stay in his yard for a whole week—this week!—and he can't go to the circus. Gee! just for readin' a dime novel!"

Peg set his jaw and drew in a long breath.

"That's a crime!" he exploded. "If my father ever did that to me I'd—I'd run off *with* the circus! Betcha! Say, you don't suppose we're late, do you?"

"No. Listen."

There was no mistaking it. No other vehicle on earth makes a noise precisely like that of a circus wagon travelling over cobblestones—a peculiar rumble of heavy wheels on hollowly clucking axles, that any boy could tell with his eyes shut; and this was the sound borne from afar on the crystal air of morning to the straining ears of Peg Packem.

"Gosh!" he yelled. "She's in! So long!"

In two shakes Peg was a streak of boy hurtling down the street intent on the purpose of assisting The World's Greatest Show safely onto the Backus Lot, with which lofty mission the young man was in entire sympathy.

"The growing boy—God bless him!" he smiled, his eyes on the scudding form ahead. "I'll be just as lonesome as a strayed pup without him."

But it requires a tremendous amount of will power to be lonesome on a circus lot with the show just getting in, and for one the young man couldn't manage it at all. He discovered after Peg's unceremonious desertion that his

own feet were quickening their pace at an unaccountable and alarming rate; they hustled him along an alley, over a fence, through short cuts, across the railroad tracks, and there he was on the Backus Lot as the first red-and-gold caravan rolled onto the grounds.

"Couldn't be better!" he cried. "I'll stick around for a half-hour or so, and then go home."

This determination was reached at sunrise, with the rim of a red-hot sun just bulging up over the edge of the world; at nine o'clock the young man was the most interested spectator surrounding a group of sweating black men whose rhythmic sledges drove home the very last peg of the "big top" which housed The World's Greatest Show. Like magic the green expanse of the Backus Lot had disappeared beneath enormous whitey-brown canvas mushrooms; flags and pennons fluttered lazily; already the vendors of great clusters of brightly-coloured toy balloons were working their way through the crowds; the neighing of horses, the weird trumpeting of elephants, the grunts of camels, the bark of seals, and the deep-throated roar of jungle beasts made thrilling appeal from behind canvas walls; at every turn one jostled elbows with stately Arabs, diminutive Japs, hawk-eyed Cossacks, swarthy

Mexicans, American Indians and swaggering cowboys.

Leave that enchanted place? The young man hadn't the remotest idea of departing until suddenly his eye was caught and held by a great expanse of painted canvas portraying "Count and Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb, the Smallest Man and Woman Alive."

"Great Scott!" he muttered, whipping out his watch and hardly able to credit his eyes. "Nine-fifteen! Here's where I get busy."

It seemed to him that he had walked for hours, and passed miles and miles of canvas, and inquired the way of fifty people before he at last found himself waiting for the Countess Hop-o'-my-Thumb in a sort of vestibule to a large tent. He had written "A friend of Fairy Dell" on his visiting card and sent it in by an obliging attendant, feeling sure that the child's name would gain him instant audience; and it did!

Suddenly the canvas flap at the end of the vestibule was snatched aside, and the tiniest little elfin mortal appeared, evidently in the greatest haste; but her tiny legs were so short, and her longest steps but a span, that she seemed to be making no progress at all. Her face was as round as a full moon, with the chubbiest cheeks, and doll's eyes of palest blue

looked past the cutest dab of a nose you ever saw, while the circle of her red lips was no bigger than a wedding ring. And the queerest thing! She seemed to be neither old nor young, but both together, as though a doll had suddenly come to life and lived for years and years without changing in the least. And the closer she came to him the taller she made the young man feel, until it seemed to him that he must be at least nine feet tall.

"Thunder, I'll have to get down on my knees to shake hands with her," he thought, genuinely confused and embarrassed. "Or I'll step on her."

But the Countess was, of course, much more accustomed to meeting great tall folks than he was to meeting the very smallest people in the world; and so she knew exactly what to do.

"Young man," she called up to him in a thin, high, childish voice, "I want to talk to you and look you in the face. Please lift me up to a seat on that blue box over there, before we do another thing."

The young man hoisted her to the big blue box, and all the way up she kept talking at a great rate.

"I can't bear to talk to skirt-ruffles and pant-legs and bony ankles and scraggly legs and bunions and shoe laces all the time," she told

him in a funny scolding way. "And, too, the dust gets right into my nose and makes me sneeze."

"Well, well, I never thought of that at all," laughed the young man as he set her down ever so gently. "Life must be quite a problem at two and a half feet from the ground."

"Indeed, it is!" she sighed, kicking her tiny heels comfortably against the blue box. "And Maximinus is just as bad the other way. He's the giant, you know, and sees nothing but hats, and is always getting tangled up in awnings, until he is quite discouraged. But never mind us freaks. Do tell me all about Fairy Dell, the darling; and then I'll tell you what I've planned. You've got to help me, or William Bellbounce —— Well, I'm going to give that man a piece of my mind. The idea!"

"Hold on, hold on!" said the young man. "Ogre Bill is ——"

"Ogre Bill?" echoed the Countess. "Who is he?"

And so the young man told her all about Fairy Dell and Ogre Bill and the fairy games they played; and how she was Queen Titania the very first time he had ever seen her; and about Aunt Caroline and the wonderful attic. Presently the young man leaned his elbow on the blue box, and the Countess hitched over

closer to him, and they talked and talked and talked.

"It will be the very best ever," declared the young man finally. "I wouldn't have it fail for anything. And now I must get away from here and do some mighty tall hustling."

"Set me down then, please," said the Countess.

She straightened her petticoats with a shake of her tiny body, and then looked up at him.

"I'm awfully glad you're not Bill Bellbounce," she said with a smile. "Oh, no doubt he's all right, but I feel that he wouldn't have understood things the way you do. Good-bye."

She blew him a midget kiss from the tips of her tiny fingers and danced away as light as thistledown.

"Well," chuckled the young man, "her heart is grown up anyway."

VI

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER

ALL the morning long Fairy Dell was a drooping flower. Not since the day upon which Rita Concannon, Goldie Alpert, Billy Smith, and Petey Noseworthy had taken the train back to Prettyman's Court after two riotous weeks at Aunt Caroline's had she experienced one gray moment until now. Even as Persephone, daughter of Demeter, had delighted to wander about the flower-strewn meadows of Sicily, so Fairy Dell, child of the sunshine, loved to roam the fields as free as the winds, coming back garlanded with daisy-chains, and clover, and buttercups, and rue, and golden lilies, her eyes shining, and marvellous tales trembling on her red, red lips—life was simply bursting-full with happiness for her.

But to-day she looked out through a smoky window; and in spite of the glorious sun and the clean, wind-swept spaces nothing appeared bright and clear and sparkling. And the day had begun so splendidly, too. First she had helped Ogre Bill with the chores, milking the

old brindle cow and squirting the stream into the black-and-white cat's pink mouth; leading Shadrach out to the trough for water, and tickling him with a straw to see him wiggle his skin; hunting eggs in the mows filled with new sweet-smelling hay; and feeding the five little pink-nosed pigs out back of the barn; then she had danced in to help Aunt Emmy with the breakfast dishes; and danced out again for a game of hide-and-seek with the chipmunk that lived in the stone wall under the sugar maples.

And then, alas! Fairy Dell had danced along the road to the next farm to play with Sam and Sarah Stubbs. They were amazed to see her, and she to see them, for they were dressed in their very best clothes—Sam even had his hair brushed and a necktie on.

"Goodness!" cried Fairy Dell in a moment of sudden doubt. "Is this Sunday?"

"Naw," said Sammy. "Better'n that. Circus!"

"Of course, silly," chimed in Sarah Stubbs with irritating importance. "We're going—aren't you?"

Fairy Dell suddenly hated Sarah Stubbs.

"I—I don't think I care to," she said loftily.

"Like ducks!" jeered Sam rudely. "Bet your Uncle Bill won't take you. Why don't you ask that Fairy Godmother you're always

raving about to take you? Huh? You dassn't—she's a fake, that's what!"

Fairy Dell's eyes blazed. "Just for that—I will!" she cried. "You wait!"

"Yah! I'll wait all right," sneered Sam. "I'll tell you all about it to-morrow—they've got most a hundred clowns, and tigers, and lions, and elephunts, and—and—a parade two miles long. And lookit! There's a ——"

Fairy Dell whirled on her heel and strode away to hide the hot, telltale tears in her eyes. She wasn't going to stand there and let Sam Stubbs talk like that to her, and she wouldn't run, but she'd walk as fast as anything till she got to the bend in the road.

"Fair-ee God-moth-er! Fair-ee God-moth-er!" chanted Sam Stubbs. "She's a fake—she's a fake!"

Fairy Dell was running; not with the idea of escaping from the taunts of horrid Sammy Stubbs, but to get home as quickly as possible in order to ask Ogre Bill to take her to the circus. But Bill had gone miles away to trade cows, and wouldn't be back until goodness only knew when. Fairy Dell went out and sat by the roadside watching for him; but all she saw was wagon load after wagon load of happy children posting into Limerick to see The World's Greatest Show.

It was very trying indeed, and Fairy Dell sat there as forlorn and lonely as Robinson Crusoe on his individual island; and with each passing group of merrymakers her little heart grew more leaden, her stomach wabbled, her Adam's apple jerked up and down terribly, and her blue eyes brimmed with scalding tears. Fairy Dell pitied herself tremendously and grew sadder than ever; she thought about taking the Veil—whatever that was!—and of dying. On the whole death gave her more satisfaction, and she hoped they'd lay her out in her new dotted white Swiss organdie dress, and have lots of tuberoses, because they smell so strong and make people faint the way they did when Rosina Morgante got drowned.

Fairy Dell smiled wanly with her eyes shut.

"Gee!" she thought pleasurably, "won't I be beautiful? And believe me, they'll be sorry they didn't take me to their old circus."

Feeling pale, and waxen, and comforted, she rose and glided wraith-like into the kitchen, where early lunch was just ready. Fairy Dell was extremely kind, and gracious, and tender with Aunt Emmy, pitying her for the loss she was to sustain—such a sad, sad loss! But by the time she had consumed nine waffles with wild honey, and three glasses of old Brindle's milk, and a dish of wild red raspberries and

cream, Fairy Dell didn't feel so very dead anyway; and besides, she couldn't get that circus out of her mind, dead or alive; it made her hopping mad every time she thought of Sammy and Sarah Stubbs having all the luck.

"Something's got to be done," she fumed. "Those Stubbses ain't—aren't—no!—ain't such a much! And after what that nasty little Sammy said —— But what *can* I do?"

Slowly she mounted the stairs to her beloved attic—it had never yet failed her in time of stress: wide, well-timbered, spacious, with a huge fireplace at one end, and a floor as smooth and solid as any down-stairs. Aunt Caroline had told the young man, who, in turn, had told Fairy Dell, that long, long ago—over a hundred years—it was the ballroom and the scene of many a gay and brilliant rout. The child loved to dress up in her finery and, all powder and patches, pretend that she was the belle of those bygone balls. She and Sir Petey Noseworthy had danced the minuet together very pleasingly, until Sir Petey had tripped over his "rapeer," and raised a lump as big and as blue as an Easter egg on his forehead.

The air was freighted with the sweet odour of sandalwood, and yet its fragrance stirred Fairy Dell to no thought of tinkly temple bells and pagodas and fat priests under saffron sun-

set skies; nor did the battered sea chest of Captain Biggs set her fancy a-sailing outbound on misty, unknown seas to adventures with a fine salty flavour; and the old ballroom was an attic only, unpeopled by dashing young cavaliers and their ladies fair. All unheeded Aunt Caroline's treasured riches spilled out of trunk and case and chest in gorgeous splashes of colour—great golden dragons crawling about on peachblow silk; here a scarf of barbaric crimson, hot and fiery; there a rich royal-purple mandarin's coat with carved ivory buttons; yonder a piece of mauve velvet; an ostrich plume of brilliant orange, and another one as white as the driven snow; a pool of emerald satin; a ripple of peacock blue and silver brocade; the mirrored flash of polished steel, and the dull red glow of beaten copper—warm, colourful, and scented like a bazaar beneath the domes and minarets of ancient Benares by the sacred Ganges, the oriental splendour of it all found no favour in the eyes of Fairy Dell.

"Nothing doing with this stuff," she said stonily; "it's too gay for me—my life's blighted. Gee! If only I could think of something forlorn and dismal and weepy and—dirty! Nobody could be miserable enough so clean and dressed up." She stood staring at

the great wide fireplace with its tarnished andirons. "I know—Cinderella! If she wasn't the hard-luck kid until her Fairy Godmother got onto her job.

"That's another thing," she reminded herself. "Sammy Stubbs says she's a fake. Well, we'll see. I'll give her a corking good chance, and if she doesn't get me to that circus—good-night! I'll never speak to a fairy again as long as I live. Hope to die if I do."

In a flash she slipped down-stairs to her own room and discarded her pretty pink gingham dress for the shabbiest one she could find, her stockings for torn ones, her neat shoes for others run down at the heels and out at the toes; a black shoestring replaced the fresh pink hair ribbon. She stood before the mirror and tried to mould her pretty little face into an expression such as one wrongfully doomed to an eternity of pots and kettles and stepmother and grate-polishing might be expected to wear.

"How sadly beautiful I am," she sighed at last. "I ought to turn the heart of any one to stone."

She got out her new dotted white organdie, and her little white shoes and stockings; then rummaged around until she found a white ribbon for her hair.

"You never can tell," she observed sagely

as she climbed the stairs again with her Sunday-best raiment on her arm; "I might have to hustle like the dickens. I wonder ——"

She stopped stock-still at the sound of wheels rattling over the hard road metal, her heart racing at the bare chance that it might be Ogre Bill. And then! But her quick ears undeceived her all too promptly.

"Old Shadrach never travelled so fast in his life," she whimpered. "It's only some more people going to the circus. Oh, dear!"

Poor Fairy Dell laid her Sunday-best clothes on top of the royal purple mandarin's coat with the carved ivory buttons, and could scarcely hold back the tears as she stood there before the great open fireplace.

"Fairy Godmother!" she called wildly. "Fairy Godmother! I want you!"

With bated breath she waited, listening tensely, watching.

"Fairy Godmother ——"

With a pitiful moan she crumpled in a heap on the wide hearthstone and sobbed and sobbed as though her heart had broken past all mending.

"Sa-Sam-my St-Stubbs—wa-was right," she wailed dismally. "There—*There ain't no fairy godmothers!*"

"What nonsense is this?" demanded a thin,

high, piping little voice sharply. "Of course there are fairy godmothers!"

Fairy Dell could not believe her senses—she thought that she must have been dreaming, or her ears playing tricks; but in either event, in her great despair she had small patience with dream voices, or any other kind.

"There ain't, there ain't, there ain't!" she sobbed. "I don't believe in fairies any more."

"Oh, dear! what a shame," piped the strange shrill voice. "And with your own loving Fairy Godmother right beside you, too! Look at me, dear, dear Fairy Dell."

Fairy Dell raised her tear-drenched face, and almost fainted away from fright and awe. It's all right to play giants and ogres and fairies and feel perfectly at home; but when you lift your head and find a really, truly Fairy Godmother standing right before your eyes, especially when you've just been horrid and nasty and shouting out in a burst of bad temper that you don't believe in fairies at all—well, it's a whole lot different. Fairy Dell gasped at the awful thing she had done.

"If you please, Fairy Godmother, I—I didn't mean what I said," she faltered. "Honest, I didn't. Well, maybe I did for a teeny little second—I had given up all hope—and even now —— Oh, don't move!"

She stretched forth a trembling hand nearer and nearer to the tiny woman, until at last she touched the chubby cheeks.

"Oh, oh!" she cried in a glad, glad voice. "Sammy Stubbs is a liar! You *are* real!"

"Bless your dear heart, of course I am," laughed the little mite as merrily as could be. "Never mind about this lying Sammy. Come here and give me a kiss—one for you!—one for me!—and one for good measure! Now then"—she wiped Fairy Dell's eyes with a pocket handkerchief about as big as four postage stamps—"tell me what you were crying for."

Fairy Dell hung her head. "The circus. I want to go to the circus."

"Oho! I thought so!" cried Fairy Godmother. "And that's what I am here to see about. It's my business, my dear. You see, I'm the regular circus Fairy Godmother attached to The World's Greatest Show; and this very morning a certain handsome person—I believe he is actually a Prince!—came to me and said, 'Fairy Godmother Hop-o'-my-Thumb, there is a child named Fairy Dell who lives about three miles out on the state highway, and she wants to go to the circus. A deserving case. Will you please attend to it?' And here I am!"

"Fairy Godmother, can I really go?"

"Yes," replied the tiny tot with a nod like a violet's; "but not in those rags. Good gracious! we're late now, and here I've got to see about decent clothes for you! Where is my wand, I'd like to know!"

"Never mind, dear Fairy Godmother," cried Fairy Dell eagerly. "Lookit!—my best dress and everything's right here. It won't take me but a minute."

Nimble fingers and a great desire can accomplish wonders in sixty seconds; certainly Aunt Emmy never would have believed that it was possible for Fairy Dell to shuck out of one dress and into another like lightning; but then Aunt Emmy had never asked Fairy Dell to go to the circus, which probably accounts for it. Fairy Dell sat on a low box and the wee woman climbed up beside her to button up the back and put the finishing touches on the hair ribbon.

"Come, my dear," she said, jumping down. "I think your dress is very lovely, and so are you."

"Sh! don't make any noise—Aunt Emmy might stop us," cautioned the child as they sped down the stairs as fast as they could. "Gee! it makes me all goose-pimply just to think of it."

"I'd like to see her!" exclaimed Fairy God-

mother Hop-o'-my-Thumb. "Or Ogre Bill, either. Wouldn't I fix 'em!"

Fairy Dell was almost willing to risk discovery, just to see what would happen to Aunt Fanny and Ogre Bill; but they gained the big front door and slipped through it without interference.

"*Oh!* oh! OH!" Fairy Dell's voice rose to a squeal of delight. "Isn't that the cutest!"

Before the broad entrance stood a tiny yellow coach, drawn by six tiny cream-coloured ponies with flowing white manes and tails, yellow plumes at their proudly arching heads, and gold-mounted harness gleaming in the sunlight. The coachman and footman, both in livery and wearing little cocked hats on top of white wigs, appeared to be little, if any, taller than the Fairy Godmother. Promptly the footman unfolded his arms and jumped nimbly down to open the coach door for them to enter, which was an easy thing for the Fairy Godmother, whereas Fairy Dell had to double up like a jack-knife to get in at all. But once in she had plenty of room on the low seat and leaned back with a blissful sigh. The footman slammed the door after them in a business-like way, and climbed up over the wheel to his seat beside the coachman, who cracked his toy

whip with a tiny pop over the prancing ponies, and they were off!

Now if Fairy Dell had chanced to look back just at that moment, she would have seen the big barn door slide open, and Aunt Emmy and Ogre Bill drive out in the surrey with old Shadrach trotting his best. And in another minute would have come out a high-stepping bay horse hitched to a shiny buggy, with the young man sitting in the driver's seat and grinning from ear to ear. But Fairy Dell had business only out in front.

"Coachman, what are their names, please?" she asked first thing. "The ponies, I mean."

"The ponies?" echoed the atom in a deep voice twenty sizes too big for him. "Well, there's Puck, and Pixie, Imp, and Elf, Sylph, and Sprite—and they can travel like the wind." With that he cracked the whip and shouted, "Hi, Pixie! Elf! Imp! Sprite! Get along there! You, Puck!"

How they did fly! The twenty-four tiny hoofs rattled like hail on the hard road, and the miles slid out from under the yellow coach so fast that before Fairy Dell had the least warning they were in Limerick and bumping over the railroad tracks on the way to the circus lot. Every cobblestone in that street must have been instantaneously changed into a

small boy, for hundreds of them seemed to rise out of the ground to form a tumultuous escort for the tiny yellow coach—they threatened to stop its passage altogether; but the gallant coachman cracked his whip madly, and the cream-coloured ponies dashed along at a spanking gait through a lane of shouting boys, and the policemen grinned and touched their caps, and the ladies and girls waved their hands and flags and balloons from the sidewalk—oh, but it was thrilling!

But all that was as nothing when, in another moment, the great tents of The World's Greatest Show burst into view with their brave showing of myriad flags and pennons and streamers, and the blaring bands setting one's blood a-tingle with stirring music such as only circus bands can play, and the hoarse voices of the barkers for the side-shows shouting out the marvels to be seen within those wonder-houses of canvas; while over all hung a delicious smell of sizzling frankfurters, and popping corn, and heated sawdust, and caged jungle beasts!—Fairy Dell's eyes, and her nose, and her ears had never been so busy before; no, never!

The child slipped one hand over Fairy Godmother's little midget fingers, and gave them an affectionate squeeze.

"If it hadn't been for you I'd have missed it!" she cried gratefully. "This is my very, *very* first circus!"

The little yellow coach swung sharply around on two wheels and turned into the Backus Lot, skirting tents, winding around great golden wagons and caravans with negroes sleeping beneath them, and finally went right through a canvas wall into a tent filled with knights in armour and their ladies on horseback, stately elephants bearing beautiful Princesses in gilded howdahs under gold umbrellas, fierce Arabs on camels, dark-skinned bowmen and spearmen standing among Roman chariots, hundreds of lovely young women in flowing robes with long palm branches in their hands and others attired as heralds bearing long silver trumpets, priests and Vestals carrying bronze censers, and eight gigantic Nubian slaves stood beside an altar which they evidently were to carry; there were pages on horseback supporting gorgeous banners, and ladies in riding habits, and huntsmen in red coats—a most bewildering array!

"Come, child," said Fairy Godmother as soon as the coach came to a stop; "we must hurry."

Hand-in-hand they ran through that waiting company, until on the far side of the big tent

they found themselves suddenly before a lot of huge elephants. Fairy Godmother Hop-o'-my-Thumb went straight up to "Kim," the biggest of them all.

"Here we are, Connors," she said to a man with a sharp hook in his hand. "This is Fairy Dell."

"Glad to meet you," said the keeper with a truly welcoming smile. "I sure was afraid you wouldn't make it—you've got about two minutes."

He gave a command to Kim, and slowly the huge bulk of the animal sank down until its body was on the ground with its forelegs out in front.

"All aboard!" said Connors, taking Fairy Godmother in his arms and mounting on the elephant's knee and trunk as a sort of a step-ladder until he placed the wee woman on the flat top of Kim's head. He was down again in a jiffy, and before she could say Jack Robinson, Fairy Dell was sitting beside Fairy Godmother with her feet dangling down over the broad forehead as comfortably as though she were on the stone wall at home. And then they went up and up until their heads were close to the top of the tent.

"Are you afraid, Fairy Dell?" asked Fairy Godmother anxiously. "If you are——"

"No, no! I love it!" cried the child. "Oh, boy! wouldn't I like to ride into Prettyman's Court! It'd give old man Concannon the jimmies again."

A grand flourish of trumpets set the waiting knights and ladies in motion. Kim moved forward majestically, not seeming to mind Fairy Dell and Fairy Godmother in the least.

"Now look, dear," said Fairy Godmother.

They were out in the vast amphitheatre—even Kim seemed small in that great space—with thousands upon thousands of faces staring out at them. The suddenness of it all, the glare of light, the crashing music, the roar of voices, and the massed humanity took Fairy Dell's breath away. At first all she could see was a blur of faces; but presently as they moved slowly around the big ring she was able to discern individual faces. She saw children, boys and girls, stand up and point admiring fingers at her and her tiny companion as Kim shuffled past, and it gave her a sense of tremendous pride and importance—she was part of the show!—and she hoped to goodness that somebody she knew would see her.

"Fair-ee Dell!" shrilled a voice that carried above all other sounds. "Fairy Dell! Yoo-hoo!"

Fairy Godmother plucked at her sleeve and

pointed to a small boy who was waving his hat frantically and shouting madly. Fairy Dell found herself looking down into the eyes of Sammy Stubbs, and they were pop-eyes and green with envy.

Leaning perilously over Kim's right ear, Fairy Dell made a face and stuck out her tongue. She did; right there before thousands of people.

"Liar!" she shrieked.

"Why, Fairy Dell!" cried Fairy Godmother in amazement. "What did you do that for?"

"That," said Fairy Dell with a scornful sniff, "was Sammy Stubbs. He said there ain't no fairy godmothers."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Fairy Godmother; and for some reason or other she laughed and laughed until two little tears no bigger than seed-pearls rolled down her doll's cheeks. "Fairy Dell, you'll be the death of me."

Given half a chance, Fairy Dell never had any difficulty in winning a good time; and here was a whole chance!—something doing every minute and no effort at all. When Connors helped her slide down the curve of Kim's trunk to the ground, she swooped right into the arms of the most comical clown in the

world—the mere sight of him made her shriek with laughter.

"How do you do, Fairy Dell?" he said, very wistfully and soberly for a clown. "I'm Buzzers, and I used to hold you in my arms when you were nothing but a dear baby; now you're grown up and look very like your mother, who was a beautiful woman. Mrs. Buzzers would love to see you, but she's home tending babies this year." He hoisted her to his shoulder and carried her off to the big tent, with Fairy Godmother running alongside as fast as her tiny legs could go, and put her down in a box where seats had been reserved. "Here you are, my dear. I must get to work, but I'll be back. You wait."

He brought a dozen or more of his mates with him, a motley crew of the most ridiculous, the merriest, and the maddest things that any one could possibly imagine. Even the wee woman, who had seen them hundreds of times, was almost in convulsions, while Fairy Dell laughed herself into a state bordering on hysteria. When they went away she was afraid they wouldn't ever come back, but glad, too, of the chance to see the wonderful, wonderful things going on all about her. It was bewildering, entrancing; no time for speech—only exclamations!—scarcely time for thought;

a place of light, and colour, and music, and action, and thrilling deeds passing the bounds of belief. The splendour of that golden afternoon! Not a moment marred; two perfect hours in the life of a child. And to think that a worm like Sammy Stubbs disbelieved in fairy godmothers!

Fairy Dell was gazing open-mouthed at Kim out there in the ring, standing up straight on his hind legs with Connors—waving Old Glory!—held high aloft in his powerful trunk, when Fairy Godmother seized her by the hand and dragged her away.

"Ah," sighed Fairy Dell when they were outside, "I suppose it really couldn't last forever, but the memory of it will—I'll never, never forget it!" She dropped to her knees and took the wee woman in her arms and kissed her. "I love you," she said. And again, "I love you, Fairy Godmother."

"Well, well!" cried the mite, her eyes wet with tears. "My dear, that is the prettiest thing I ever had said to me, and I've talked with kings, and queens, and bigwigs the world over. There aren't many people who love me, Fairy Dell, and the love of a child is —— Oh, come, come! or I shall cry my eyes out!"

They hurried along and finally passed within another tent, where Fairy Dell was immedi-

ately engulfed in the arms of the fattest woman in the world—six hundred pounds of her!—and the tattooed lady tried to pull the child away from her and kiss her; and the human skeleton sniffed and coughed and told her in a mournful, husky voice that he was glad to see her again; and the blue man turned a regular indigo hue from excitement and had hard work breathing at all; and Count Hop-o'-my-Thumb danced up and down and worked himself into a terrible fit of temper because nobody would either set Fairy Dell down where he could see her, or lift him up where he could see her, until at last the giant solved the difficulty by giving Fairy Dell a seat on one of his huge palms, and Count Hop-o'-my-Thumb a seat opposite on the other; and the sword-swallower, who swallowed a five-foot sword any time, choked on nothing at all and had to be pounded on the back by the bearded lady, who fortunately noticed him, though she was crying into her whiskers at the time. All the while the rubber man kept grabbing handfuls of his skin and letting it snap back into place again in the most remarkable way—Fairy Dell was fascinated by the spectacle.

It was all very exciting, and might have gone on for hours, if Fairy Godmother hadn't taken matters into her own hands.

"Put the child down, Maximinus," she ordered the giant, who obeyed as meekly as anything. "The races are on, and in a few minutes the mob will be out to trample us under foot. Come, Fairy Dell."

The snake-charmer lifted up the child's chin and kissed her.

"Good-bye, dear," she said softly. "I think you are the image of your mother, only prettier."

In another moment or two they had gained the little yellow coach. The six cream-coloured ponies were tossing their heads and pawing the earth with impatience, and it only needed a shake of the reins by the tiny coachman to send them away at an eager trot.

"Say, Fairy Godmother," said Fairy Dell as soon as they were clear of the crowds and out on the open road, "I don't get a lot of this stuff. What's all this talk about my mother and father? Gee! you'd think I belonged to The World's Greatest."

"Well, now," said the wee woman with a crafty little smile, "I should ask your Uncle Bill Bellbounce about that."

"Leave it to me," replied Fairy Dell. "I shall."

She leaned back against the cushions a thoroughly exhausted but supremely happy child.

She tried her best to keep her head up and answer questions; but it was so warm and comfy there, and the twenty-four tiny hoofs kept up such a monotonous clatter, and the rumble of the wheels was so soothing that her eyes drooped and drooped until they were shut tight when at last the yellow coach drew up before the broad entrance at Aunt Caroline's. And there was the young man sitting on the steps.

"Sh!" said the Countess, one midget finger at her lips. "She's asleep."

"I'll carry her up to her own bed," said the young man. "Poor little skeezicks is all played out."

"No such thing!" said the Countess. "The attic, of course. Don't you see?"

"Of course," replied the young man; "the very thing."

They laid her down very gently on a long chest covered with soft shawls and pillowed her head on the royal purple mandarin's coat with the carved ivory buttons. She stirred when the young man put her down, and again when the wee woman kissed her good-bye and stroked her hair. Then they stole away.

A lacquer box toppled from the edge of a tall case, and fell to the floor with a clatter.

"Dear me!" cried Fairy Dell, starting up

and rubbing her eyes. "I've been asleep—and dreaming. Oh, what a wonderful dream!"

Her eyes filled and her lips trembled.

"I hate it to be only a dream," she whimpered. "It was such fun—such a golden day. I——"

She stopped short as the nickering of a pony, the cutest whinny imaginable, came faintly to her ears.

"Pixie!" she breathed. "Or Elf!—or Sprite!—or Imp!"

She ran to the window and looked down just in time to see a tiny yellow coach drawn by six cream-coloured ponies with flowing white manes and tails sweep out of the driveway onto the state highway. From one coach window a tiny hand waved a pocket handkerchief about as big as four postage stamps.

"Fairy Godmother!" cried Fairy Dell happily. "I *knew* I couldn't dream a whole blamed circus!"

III

The Golden Day of Orpheus

Orph was seated on the chopping-block

I

"PAW" TAKES A HAND

"PAW," said Orpheus, breezing into the kitchen, where his father was shaving, "paw."

"Um-huh!" grunted Father Smith, carefully coasting his upper lip with his pet razor.

"Say, paw," continued Orpheus, blithely, satisfied that he had gained his father's attention, "I'm goin' out to the woodshed to study my Sunday-school lesson. It's cool out there."

"Ouch!" Father Smith's dedal hand twitched like a galvanized frog's leg and snicked out a neat triangle of hide from just under the septum of his nose. *"What's that?"*

He eyed his son's reflected visage in the mirror for a moment, then swung about and scrutinized his offspring in utter bewilderment.

"Say that again," he demanded, tensely.

"Say what?" parried Orph, gazing with fascinated eyes at his parent, down whose white-lathered lip and chin a tenuous stream of

blood trickled with the startling distinctness of a red stripe on a stick of peppermint candy. "Oh, yes," he recalled innocently. "I'm goin' out to the woodshed to study my Sunday-school lesson."

A hard glint steeled Father Smith's eye. "I thought that was it," he observed, grimly. "What's the game, young man?"

Orph looked offended. "Aw, gee whiz!" he whined in a hurt voice. "You're always pickin' on me. Scold me if I don't get my lesson, and now when I want to —— What's the use tryin', anyhow?" He smiled wistfully at his father.

It was rather overdone. Father Smith's wonder grew as he contemplated the youngster. Here it was not yet nine o'clock, and Orph's shoes were polished to a door-knob finish, his cravat was neatly tied, and his wet hair was plastered down snugly against his round skull. Moreover, instead of sporting the usual Sunday-morning thunder-cloud, Orph's brow was now serene and his freckled, sunburned visage frankly advertised to the world that he was at peace with all mankind.

Father Smith was clearly puzzled. Such immaculate grooming had never before been accomplished except at cost of terrible effort by the combined parental forces. And here

was the thing achieved without a struggle, miles ahead of schedule time. It was unbelievable.

"Let's see your finger nails," he commanded, hopefully.

Orph displayed ten digits, the nails edged in lightest-gray tones instead of their wonted fringe of deepest-mourning black.

Father Smith sighed. "All right, Orph," he said, gloomily, acknowledging defeat by moving over to the mirror and beginning to strop his razor. "But mind, no funny business."

"Call me when it's time to go," said Orph. "I'm awful sorry you went and cut yourself, paw."

"Humph!" grunted Father Smith.

Orph went through the screen door quietly, with an ostentatious display of the Sunday leaflet. It was a beautiful summer's morning, hot and still and brooding with the sweet quietude of the Lord's Day. Bees were humming about the sweet-clover bushes; locusts shrilled lazily and intermittently; pigeons cooed their amorous confidences softly and pleasingly, while the fat Plymouth Rocks had long since given over their busy foraging for the placid delights of the dust-bath under the currant bushes. But if Orph even dimly perceived the glories of the wonderful morning as

he quickened his steps across the back yard he gave no sign or paused to drink them in. His business lay in the woodshed.

"Humph!" said Father Smith to himself in the mirror. "Now what?"

Almost any parent would naturally thrill with satisfaction over the announcement that his son, of his own volition, intended to study his Sunday-school lesson and seriously meditate thereon. But in the case of Father Smith precisely that was the fly in the amber.

Viewed in the light of past performance, the mere declaration was in itself ground for suspicion; and, although he frankly admitted that he ought to be ashamed of himself for his doubts, Father Smith resumed shaving with the uncomfortable feeling that all was not well.

"By ginger!" he exploded at last. "It may be straight goods, Orph, my son, but father is going to have a look-in."

Completing operations with reckless haste, Father Smith made stealthy descent on the woodshed, to view with his own eyes the miracle of his son and heir in voluntary pursuit of the Golden Text.

Orph was seated on the chopping-block, strictly observing the convention that the light should fall over the reader's left shoulder, but the light fell not on the Golden Text. Not so.

At the precise moment when Father Smith's left eye glued itself to a knothole in the woodshed wall Orph was many geographical miles removed from the shores of Galilee. He was, as a matter of record, roaming our Western plains in company with Silver Bullet Steve, King of the Prairie.

"Ah!" exclaimed Father Smith, suddenly. Then he uttered several words wildly.

Orph scarcely breathed, for a malignant redskin was crawling through the long grass towards the heroic figure of Silver Bullet Steve, who battled on all unaware of his peril, and with no one to give him friendly warning. The assassin crept nearer and nearer, lifted his gleaming knife, crouched for the lethal spring, and ——

The sentence split at the very bottom of page eighteen. Trembling with fearsome anticipation, the boy fluttered the leaf. Alas! the battle is still on, the knife still poised, and Silver Bullet Steve is still in direst peril so far as Orpheus is concerned; for at the very moment of fluttering the leaf his father's left hand clutched the vivid chronicle, his right hand closed on the shell of his son's left ear, and Orph was personally conducted back to the shores of Galilee.

The fortunes of war ought not to ruffle any-

body, yet Orph was undeniably sore; he was sore in his pride and other places. He carried a little heart as black as the ace of spades to Sunday school, where he denied, and rightly so, a speaking acquaintance with the Golden Text.

"I don't know nothin' about the Gold'n Tex', and I don't want to, and I ain't goin' to," he rudely affirmed when questioned by pretty Miss Harding.

"Oh, Orpheus!" Miss Harding bit her lip and her blue eyes filled. "I'm *so* sorry. Are you sure?"

Orpheus kicked at the bench in front of him and made no reply. After a painful silence Miss Harding passed on to "Jig" Skerrett, and Orph was left to nurse his gloomy grouch undisturbed.

The boy's errant thoughts flew through the open window out into the golden sunshine, where bumblebees blundered at their tasks, grasshoppers clacked lazily about, and the sun-baked pines gave out the pleasantest odour imaginable, away and beyond all this Sunday peace and quiet to a scene of frightful carnage in the Bad Lands.

"Gee!" he half whispered; "I wonder how Silver Bullet Steve got away. Durn paw, anyway!"

That afternoon Father Smith issued an ultimatum which increased Orph's animosity by one thousand.

"Orph," he said, sternly, "in view of your deliberately studied attempt to deceive me, I have decided that you are not to leave the yard for one week. And, mind you, no other boys are to come in here, either. You think this over alone."

Orph turned pale. "Say," he gasped, "you don't mean *this* week, do you?"

Father Smith looked down at his son, smothering an exclamation of wrath at the look of agony on the boy's face, and replied in the affirmative.

"Certainly," he said. "What other week would I mean?"

"Why—why—*it's circus week!*"

So it was. The World's Greatest Show was coming to Limerick with the greatest collection of untamed jungle beasts, the greatest herd of elephants, the greatest aggregation of clowns in existence—forty marvellously merry mountebanks; count them, forty—and it was coming on Friday!

Father Smith looked serious. But he was a man of convictions; the "dime novel" was one of them; another was a foolish pride in the fact that when he said a thing the thing stood for

all time. Presently Father Smith shook his head and it was "thumbs down" for Orph.

"I do not see any reason for changing my mind, Orph," said Father Smith in his self-righteous manner. "You will have to stay in the yard for one week, as I said."

It took less than one second for the dire truth to dawn upon Orph, and when it did an anguished moan escaped him. His nether lip trembled. Then suddenly his face blanched, and a terrible white-hot anger flamed within him. He turned blazing eyes upon his father.

"I hate you!" he cried fiercely, and fled from the house to throw himself face downward under the lilac bushes.

"Orph, come back ——" Father Smith began and stopped, stricken dumb by the awful thing his son had said to him. It stunned him; frightened him for a moment with the dread that it might really be true. He was impelled to rush out and gather into his arms the sobbing form under the lilac bushes and ask him to unsay it; but the impulse faded on the moment. Father Smith shrugged his shoulders and hardened his lips. "The rascal!" he muttered. "Now I'm certain he can't go."

Nor could Orph obtain commutation of sentence for good behaviour, a boon granted the

most hardened villains in State's prison—murderers even. His mother's pleading in his behalf availed him nothing. Father Smith shook his head and remained adamant.

"It'll be a lesson to him, Annie," said Father Smith.

On Thursday morning, tragically lonely, Orph sat on the chopping-block and ate his heart out. Sullenly threshing over the whole affair from a boy's view-point, he simply could not make the punishment fit the crime; it was beyond belief that just reading a dime novel was worth one whole week of a boy's life and a licking besides. Peg Packem's father had just licked Peg; Fat Wilkins's father had taken Fat's novel and read it through himself—he sat up till midnight—and then, after burning it up in the kitchen stove, he told Fat he'd whale the life out of him if he was ever caught with one of the things again.

That was the kind of parent to have. But his own! Black hatred filled Orph's soul, and he vowed that henceforth they were no parents of his. How *could* a boy love parents who invented ways to torture their only offspring?

"Curses on them!" muttered Orph, mouthing a phrase gleaned from other sources than his Sunday-school leaflet. "I'm goin' to that show to-morrow, anyway. I'll run off."

He lifted his small obstinate face with determination written all over it. He half rose from the block, only to slump back in despair. The tyrants still held him under heel—he had no money. Only last week his thrifty mother had looted his toy bank to buy him Sunday shoes; a loathly game of high finance which Orph detested as a system of highway robbery and burglary combined.

II

TOOTHACHE AND TANBARK

FOR Orpheus Smith that Thursday was the longest day in all time. He felt himself age perceptibly under the mental strain of futile scheming; and then out of a blank gray intellectual fog suddenly popped an idea, a working plan of salvation.

"It's a cinch!" he shouted. "You wait."

He rose from the chopping-block with the light of a great hope shining in his eyes, and went into the house, where he ate a dinner passing the bounds of belief. The rest of the afternoon was spent in garnering grimy lumps of chewing-gum from the under edges of tables and chairs. These lumps were reduced to a homogeneous mass by a process of prolonged mastication, and when artfully disposed between the cheek and the gums this mass faithfully simulated that morbific tumefaction commonly known as a "gumboil." It was fully warranted to reduce a heart of stone to instant sympathy.

Orph viewed his artifice in the mirror and rested content, for he saw that it was good.

"There!" he gloated. "I reckon if one of them fakes got 'Jig' Skerrett out of school three days runnin', it ought to get me out of this yard long enough to see the tents, anyhow."

Upon his return home that Thursday evening, Father Smith found Orph perched in the angle of the front and side fences. The lad's face rested in the palm of his right hand and wore an anguished expression, as of suffering repressed with effort. There was a miserable droop to the whole body.

"Hello, Orph!" said Father Smith, cheerily. "What's the matter, old fellow? Sick?"

The tone touched something deep down in Orph's little chest and started the moisture to his eyes, but he resolutely stifled the emotion. He would play the game out.

"Jawache," he snivelled.

"Pshaw! that's too bad," said Father Smith, in his hearty way. "Guess it won't amount to much. Come on in to supper."

"Don't want no supper," mumbled Orph. "It's jumpin'."

"Well, come on in out of the air, son," urged his father. "After supper ma will fix you up finer'n a cotton hat."

Orph slid down and carefully carried his jaw indoors and allowed himself to be persuaded to eat some supper. But after having consumed as much food as would, he thought, carry him through the night, the jaw began to ache like sixty again. He retired limply to the lounge in the sitting-room.

"It's too bad, Orph," said Mother Smith, softly. "I'll fix it up soon."

And so, when the dishes were done and a batch of bread set to rise, Mother Smith brought in a basin of nice warm water and washed his dusty feet, taking particular pains not to hurt the wicked stone bruise on the left one or the nasty stubbed toe on the right one. Then she bound a piping-hot hop-bag over the alleged jumping jaw, gave him a sweet mother's kiss and packed him off to bed trembling on the verge of tears and confession.

"Dawgone it!" whimpered Orph when he was at last safe between the sheets, "I wish I *did* have a jawache! But I got to see that show, and that settles it!"

To the naked eye Orph was a miserably dejected being next morning. His jaw appeared to be horribly swollen, and so sensitive withal that he refused to allow his parents within forty rows of apple trees of it. Not much! He cupped the swelling in a tender palm and

looked pained to death; on feeling either parental gaze fixed upon him he writhed and groaned dismally.

"Jeeminy crickets!" he wailed in anguish. "Christmas! I can't stand this toothache much longer!"

Mother Smith went over and stood beside him. "It's got to be pulled," she announced, firmly; "you might as well let me do it now and have it over with."

"I won't!" howled Orph, dodging to the other side of the room, his spine creeping and the roots of his hair crawling, while chill fear clutched at his heart with the imminence of discovery. "The string broke three times the last one you pulled. This one's in back, and you ain't strong enough."

Mother Smith glanced meaningly at her husband, who shook his head and slowly inserted his hand into his "change" pocket.

"Not for mine!" he decided. "Guess this job's up to a dentist. How much is it?"

Orph took a natural breath.

"A quarter," suggested Mother Smith.

"It's a half," amended Orph, eagerly. "It costs more when you kill the pain first."

"You can stand the pain all right, brave little man," urged his frugal mother. "It will soon be over."

"Soon nothin'!" retorted Orph indignantly. "Say, paw," he demanded, turning upon his father, "would you have yourn pulled without killin' the pain first?"

There followed an impressive silence which cost Father Smith a quarter; he winced involuntarily, and his crafty son read him as an open book.

"Bet your life you wouldn't!" he asserted glibly. "And if a strong grown-up man like paw wouldn't, what do you think a kid like me is made of? Gee whiz!"

Father Smith silently retrieved a half-dollar and passed it over. Orph grabbed his cap and went through the door like a streak.

"Good-bye!" he cast over his shoulder.

For the life of him he could not quite eliminate the triumphant ring from his voice. It haunted Father Smith, who sat down to his breakfast with the vague unpleasant sensation that he had been somehow "stung," as Orph would have neatly expressed it.

Orph set his gladsome feet outside the front gate and breathed the wine-like air with all the intoxication of a life-prisoner suddenly paroled. Unmindful of stone-bruise or stubbed toe, he flew straight as a homing pigeon down to the old "Backus lot," where a vast sea of whity-brown canvas billowed and thousands of pen-

nons and flags of all nations fluttered and snapped in the brisk breeze.

Caravans and band-wagons gorgeous with gleaming gold and silver, red animal dens uncountable, horses, spotted ponies, chariots, a camel and two dromedaries just lurching within the menagerie tent—this thrilling picture greeted his enraptured eye; the quick tattoo of iron sledges on tent-pins, the hoarse shouts of sweating men, the whinnying of horses, and, yes! the weird trumpeting of a huge elephant made music, a symphony, in his ears.

The World's Greatest was "in."

Even as he drew up close a strange, hot, musty, feline odour, the odour of caged wild animals and sawdust mingled, puffed out from under the canvas walls and assailed his delighted nostrils.

"Lions! and tigers! and—and—and wolves!" breathed Orph, snuffing deep and full. "Jeeminy whiskers! don't they smell good!"

Vanished instantly all thoughts of fictitious jawache and outrageous parole. Up to that instant the utmost limits of his daring had included only a wild dash to the "lot" for a glimpse of the World's Greatest, and then a return, much less blithely, to sacrifice a perfectly sound molar on the altar of his heart's

desire. But that whiff of caged carnivora settled it. Orph shucked off his moral integument as easily as you slip the skin of a ripe Concord grape, and the thing was accomplished. Joyously whistling a spirited air, he plunged into the delightful vagabondage of circus day. Orph had actually run off.

Some special circus deity watched over Orph that day and kept him and his father travelling on parallel lines; for of a certainty they did not meet, despite the fact that Father Smith spent his nooning, and then some, on the "Backus lot" in lively anticipation of starting a circus of his own, in which Orph was cast for the ground and lofty tumbling. But he went home empty-handed, with itching palm and twitching fingers, his fiercely gleaming eye striking terror to the heart of more than one innocent youth not even remotely resembling the scion of the house of Smith.

Orph filched a golden day crammed with adventures surpassing the adventures of the "Arabian Nights." There was not a pinchbeck flaw anywhere, and the youngster enjoyed to the full each swiftly winging enchanted moment under the big canvas top. He stayed for the concert, and was one of the very last group to leave the charmed arena. But the first blast of cool outside air struck a chill

to his heart; he turned pale with apprehension, a sickening sense of guilt and foreboding. The glamour of the big show vanished, and he did not need an astrologer to warn him that "a dark man with a cane" was camping on his trail. Nothing like that. He was suddenly a desperately forlorn little boy with a lump in his throat and a weight at his heart, tired to death, starved, and scared blue.

Skirting the merry crowd, he started home at a brisk walk, which unconsciously was quickened to a dog-trot, and then to headlong panicky flight. Something drove him at high speed, as if to overtake and distance the dread fate impending, until his winged feet carried him within sight of his own home, and there the impulse faded out altogether and left him with leaden limbs.

"Good-*night!*" ejaculated Orph in a frightened gasp. "There's paw hangin' around the gate."

He slouched along slowly, his mind groping for some slender reed to lean on; but the more he reviewed the case, the more certain he was of its utter helplessness. The most damning bit of evidence, as he viewed it, a point which robbed him of the plea of inadvertence and spontaneity, lay in the fact that while the swelling had disappeared from his cheek, his teeth

still numbered precisely the same as when he had left home in the morning. This undeniable fact worried Orph. There was no saving hiatus in the ivory rows; no gaping wound to satisfy the doubting Thomases at home. If even now he could but manage to get rid of a molar, he would chance the rest. But how? Five cents alone remained of the half-dollar, and what self-respecting dentist would separate a molar from its moorings for five cents?

"Nothing doing," groaned Orph. "It's me for a whaling and life imprisonment. Oh, you Silver Bullet Steve!"

With a wan smile the lad edged along, his feet carrying him insensibly to a street where a dentist had "parlours." Orph started with unfeigned surprise on finding himself in a dingy hallway flanked on one side by a display case of photographs of babies, high-school graduates with diplomas, and June brides with veils, wilted bouquets, and wooden-looking husbands; on the other side by an enormous glass bin three-quarters full of gleaming white teeth; there were old molars, young and middle-aged molars, bicuspids, incisors, and tricuspids—each and every one sporting a black cavity which had harboured a one-time jumping toothache. There must have been half a bushel of them.

"Jeeminy!" gasped Orph. "Ain't that the limit!"

His fascinated gaze rested on the gruesome relics with actual envy. If only one of his own molars were out and neatly wrapped in a fold of newspaper, he could go home cheerfully and take his medicine like a man. A door slammed at the head of the stairs, and he looked up to see a boy of his own age descending. He was a stranger, pale and somewhat bloody of countenance; and he carried a bit of folded newspaper in his hand.

"Tooth out?" inquired Orph, amiably.

"Yep," replied the boy, with exceedingly moist articulation. "Two."

"Gee!" cried Orph, admiringly. "Let's see 'em."

The paper was unfolded with boyish flourish, and Orph gazed at the sanguinary roots in awed silence.

"Take anything?" he asked at last. "Hurt much?"

"Naw!" lied the stranger, vaingloriously. "I can stand anything. A couple o' teeth being pulled ain't nothing."

Orph let this pass unchallenged, for as he gazed a great idea took shape, nebulous at first but quickly crystallizing into a plan of salvation.

"Say," he cried eagerly, "gimme one, will you?"

"Not much, I won't," retorted the other indignantly. "What do you take me for?"

"Aw, go ahead!" wheedled Orph; "don't be stingy. You got two, ain't you?"

"Who ever heard of you?" was the scornful rejoinder.

Orph considered a moment. "I'll give you a nickel for one," he offered, briskly.

"Real money?" sneered the stranger. "Chase yourself."

It looked decidedly like a deadlock; but Orph did not propose to let a little thing like that worry him. He needed a tooth in his business, needed a newly harvested tooth, and here were two of them before his very eyes. He was desperate, and time was flitting; his eyes hardened and his muscles tightened.

"Do I get one?" he demanded, tensely.

"Gwan, you make me sicker'n a horse," jeered the stranger. "You're bughouse. Beat it."

Orph took a rapid survey of the quiet street and found the coast clear. When he looked back, the stranger had folded the paper and was returning it to his pocket with an air of finality. Orph doubled his fists and stepped in front of him, completely blocking the exit.

"Come on," he flamed. "You won't sell me one, and you won't gimme one, so we'll fight."

The blood-stained youth shrank back in alarm, but his hands flew to position of defense with the readiness of an old campaigner.

"Say, you!" he bellowed, warningly.

"Gimme one, or sell, or fight," was Orph's cold-blooded ultimatum. There was a murderous gleam in his eye.

There were no preliminary fancy frills; neither the usual coin-tossing for corners nor the accustomed farce of shaking hands. This was not a fistic contest, but plain, unadorned highway robbery, in which the element of surprise counts for much. So Orph handed the stranger a stinging paste on the ear and another in the wind. Yowling with rage and pain, he came back at Orph like a lambent flame, and the engagement became general.

"Ouch!" yapped the stranger.

"Ugh!" grunted Orph.

They slugged and clinched, feinted and ducked, side-stepped and rushed, to the Queen's taste. Then most unexpectedly Orph was presented with a corkscrew in the solar plexus which almost put him out of the gate receipts; but his adversary was leaning against the tooth-bin stanching the crimson flow from

his nose, quite unable to follow up his advantage.

"Gimme one?" bawled Orph, as soon as he could manage one deep inspiration. "Gimme one?"

"Naw!" shrieked the strange knight, tears of rage in his voice.

He braced to meet Orph's bull-like rush and accommodated a short-arm jolt on the floating ribs, neatly countering with a wicked uppercut that drove Orph's teeth into his tongue and drew blood. Then a smashing wallop full on the stranger's left optic made him see the error of his ways. He threw up the sponge.

"Here," he sobbed, groggily, "take the durned old teeth."

He tossed the packet to Orph, who selected the largest and bloodiest tooth, carefully entombed it in half the paper, and returned the other one to its rightful owner. Next he explored his pockets and fished out a nickel.

"Here's your money," he puffed. "And say, kid, you're some little old scrapper. You're all right."

Clutching his ill-gotten booty, he scooted up the street as fast as he could leg it. Around the first corner he halted to get his breath and arrange his disordered clothing. A seraphic grin grew and spread across his freckled phiz.

"Oh, I don't know!" he chuckled. "I guess yes."

Rehabilitated, inflated with the pride of conquest, and with the hot blood of recent conflict still surging within him, the young outlaw advanced to his own gate and lifted the latch. Under the crab-apple tree by the side door he met Father Smith.

"Hello, paw!" he called, cheerily. "Want to see the tooth?"

"I want to see all of you—in the woodshed," said Father Smith, tight-lipped and grim. "March!"

Orph marched. He walked unwillingly but with head erect and his stride did not falter.

"Well," he thought, "it's been a corking day—up till now!"

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